V. GARSHIN

The SCARLET FLOWER

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LITERATURE

В. ГАРШИН

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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
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V. GARSHIN

THE SCARLET FLOWER

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FOUR DAYS

I remember running through the woods, forcing our way through the hawthorn bushes, while the bullets whizzed around us, snapping off branches. The shooting became heavier. Red flashes spurted here and there on the edge of the wood. Sidorov, a young soldier of Company One ("What is he doing in our skirmish line?"

I found myself wondering), suddenly slumped down on the ground and looked back at me in silence with great frightened eyes. Blood trickled from his mouth. Yes, I remember that clearly. I also remember how, in the dense undergrowth, within almost a stone's throw from the edge of the wood, I first saw him. . . . He was a huge fat Turk, but I went straight for him, weak and thin though I was. There was a report, and something flew past me, something enormous, it seemed to me; there was a ringing in my ears. "He is shooting at me," came the thought. With a scream of terror he recoiled against a thick hawthorn bush. He could have gone round it, but in his fear he did not know what he was doing and flung himself upon the prickly branches. I struck out, and knocked the rifle out of his hands, then struck again and felt my bayonet sinking into something soft. There was a queer sound, something between a snarl and a groan. Then I ran on. Our men were shouting "hurrah!", dropping, shooting. I remember firing several shots after I had come out of the woods into a clearing. Suddenly the cheers sounded louder and we all moved forward again. I should have said "our men" instead of "we," because I was left behind. I thought it rather odd. Still more odd was it when all of a sudden everything disappeared, and all the shouting and the shooting were silenced. I heard nothing, and saw only a patch of blue; it must have been the sky. Then that went too.

I have never been in such a queer position before. I am lying, I believe, on my stomach, and see nothing in front of me but a small patch of earth. A few blades of grass, an ant, its head lowered, crawling along with one of them, bits of rubbish from last year's grass—that is my whole world. And I see it with only one eye, as the other one is pressed hard up against something—no doubt the branch on which my head is resting. I am terribly

uncomfortable, and want to shift my position, and simply can't understand why I am not able to do so. Time passes. I hear the chirr of grasshoppers, the hum of bees. Not a sound more. At last, with an effort, I disengage my right arm from under my body, and pushing away from the ground with both hands, I make an effort to get up on my knees.

A pain, intense and swift as lightning, shoots through my whole body from knees to chest and head, and I fall back. Again darkness, a void.

I wake up. Why do I see the stars shining so brightly in the blue-black Bulgarian sky? Am I not in my tent? What made me crawl out of it? I make a movement and feel an excruciating pain in the legs.

Yes, I have been wounded. Is it dangerous or not? Both my right and left legs are clotted with blood. When I touch them the pain gets worse. It's like a toothache—a continuous gnawing pain. There is a ringing in my ears, and my head is weighted with lead. Dimly I realize that I have been hit in both legs. What's the matter? Why didn't they pick me up? Have the Turks beaten us? I begin to recollect what happened to me, at first vaguely, then ever more clearly, and come to the conclusion that we have not been beaten at all. Because I dropped (I do not actually remember that, but I do remember everyone running forward while I wasn't able to, and being left behind with something blue before my eyes)—I dropped in the clearing, just on top of the mound. Our little battalion commander had pointed out that clearing to us. "Make for that, boys!" he had cried in his ringing voice. And we had made it, so we could not have been defeated. Then why hadn't they picked me up? It was an open spot here, they could not have missed me. Besides, I probably wasn't the only one lying there. They had been shooting so rapidly. I must turn my head and have a look. I can do that

more comfortably now, because when I had come to myself that time and seen the ant with the blade of grass crawling along head downwards, I had tried to get up and had dropped again not in my former position but on my back. That's why I can see the stars.

I raise myself and sit up. It's a hard thing to do with both my legs crippled. I had almost given it up in despair, but managed it at last with tears of pain springing to my eyes.

Overhead is a bit of blue-black sky with a big star and several small ones shining in it surrounded by something dark and tall. It's the bushes. I'm in the undergrowth—they have overlooked me!

I can feel the roots of my hair crawling on my head.

But what could I be doing in the undergrowth when I was wounded in the clearing? I must have crawled over here dazed with pain. The odd part about it is I cannot stir a limb now, while before I had been able to drag myself over to these bushes. Perhaps I had been hit only once then, and the second bullet had got me here.

Faint pink circles began to swim before my eyes. The big star faded and some of the smaller ones vanished. It was the moon rising. How good it was at home now!

Strange sounds reach my ears. It's like someone moaning. Yes, it's a moan. Is it someone else lying next to me overlooked, someone with crippled legs or a bullet in his stomach? No, the moans sound so near, but there doesn't seem to be anyone near me.... My God, why it's me myself! Low piteous moans; is the pain really as bad as that? It must be. Only I do not realize it, my head is so leaden and clouded. I had better lie down again and go to sleep—to sleep, sleep.... Would I ever wake up, though? Who cares.

Just as I am preparing to lie down a broad pale strip of moonlight clearly illumines the place where I am lying, and I see something dark and big lying within five paces

of me. The moon picks out bright spots on it here and there. These are buttons or accoutrement. It's a dead body or a wounded man.

I don't care what it is—I'm going to lie down. . . .

No, it cannot be! Our men could not have retreated. They are here, they have driven back the Turks and are holding these positions. Then why is there no murmur of talk, no crackle of camp-fires? It must be that I am too weak to hear anything. They must be here, I am sure.

"Help! Help!"

Wild, hoarse, frantic cries burst from my throat, but remain unanswered. They resound loudly in the night air. All else is silence. Only the grasshoppers keep up their ceaseless chirp. The round face of the moon looks down on me sorrowfully.

If he were wounded he would have come to from such a cry. It is a corpse. One of ours or a Turk? Ah, my God! What difference does it make? And sleep descends upon my burning eyes.

I lie with closed eyes, although I have long been awake. I do not want to open them, as I can feel the sunlight through my closed eyelids; if I open them the glare of the sun will hurt. And I had better not move either. Yesterday (was it yesterday?) I was wounded; a day has passed; more days will pass, and I shall die. Who cares. I had better not stir. Let my body lie still. If only I could stop my brain working, too! But nothing can check it. Thoughts and memories throng in my head. That is not for long, though; soon the end will come. All that will remain will be a few lines in the newspapers saying that we had sustained few casualties—so many wounded, volunteer Private Ivanov killed. They will not even write the name; just—one killed. One private, like that wretched little dog.

A vivid scene leaps to my mind. It was long ago; but then my whole life, *that* life I had lived before I lay here with shot up legs, was so long ago.... I was walking down the street. and the sight of a crowd of people made me stop. They were standing in silence, looking at a bleeding ball of white that was whimpering piteously. It was a pretty little dog that had been run over by a horse tram. It was dying, as I am now. A janitor pushed through the crowd, picked the dog up by the scruff of its neck and carried it away. The crowd dispersed.

Would someone carry me away? No, I am to lie here and die. And how beautiful life is! That day (when the accident occurred to the dog) I was happy. I walked along drunk with joy, and had good reason to be. Ah, aching memories, leave me alone, do not torment me! The joy that was, the anguish that is ... let the anguish alone remain; it is easier to bear than memories which compel comparisons. Ah, what agony! You are worse than wounds!

It is becoming hot, though. The sun is blazing. I open my eyes and see the same bushes, the same sky, only now in daylight. And there is my neighbour. It's a Turk, a corpse. What a huge man! I know him, it's that same man....

Before me lies the man I have killed. What did I kill him for?

He lies there dead and gory. What fate had cast him here? Who is he? Perhaps he, too, like me, has an old mother. How long will she sit on the doorstep of her squalid little clay hut in the evenings, looking northward to see whether her beloved son, her breadwinner and worker, is coming home?

And I? And I too.... I would gladly change places with him. How happy he must be not to hear anything, not to feel the pain of his wounds, nor the deadly anguish, nor the thirst.... The bayonet had pierced him to the heart.

There was a big black hole in his uniform with blood round it. *I had done that.*

I had not meant to. I had had no grudge against any one when I went to fight. The thought that I would have to kill anybody had not occurred to me somehow. I had merely seen *myself* putting *my own* chest out to meet the bullets. And I had gone and done so.

And now what? Ah, fool, fool! And this poor fellah (he was wearing Egyptian uniform)—he was still less to blame. Until they were packed into a steamer like herrings in a barrel and shipped to Constantinople, he had never heard of Russia or of Bulgaria. He had been told to go, so he had gone. If he had not he would have been bastinadoed, or some pasha perhaps would have shot him down with a revolver. He had made the long and gruelling march from Stambul to Rustchuk. We had attacked, he had defended himself. But seeing what formidable men we were—men who had kept pushing on and on in face of his patented English Peabody-Martini rifle—terror had struck his heart. And when he had wanted to retreat, some little fellow, whom he could have killed with one blow of his dark fist, had rushed at him and plunged his bayonet into his heart.

Was it his fault?

Was it my fault, for that matter, although I did kill him? This thirst is terrible. Thirst! Who knows what that word means! Even when we were going through Rumania, marching fifty versts a day under a terrific heat of over a hundred degrees, I had never felt what I am feeling now. Ah, I wish somebody would come!

My God! Why, he must have some water in that huge flask of his! How can I get to it, though. At what cost? But get to it I must.

I begin to crawl. My legs drag, my weakened arms barely push my inert body forward. The corpse lies within fifteen feet of me, but for me this is more—not more, but

worse–than fifteen miles. But crawl up to it I must. My throat burns. Besides, you'll only die quicker without water. As it is, you stand some chance.

And I crawl forward. My legs drag over the ground, and every movement is agony. I scream, scream and weep with pain, but crawl on. At last I reach the body. There is the flask . . . it has water in it–a lot of water! It must be at least half full. Oh, that water will last me a long time–it will last me till I die!

You are saving my life, my poor victim! Leaning on one elbow, I begin to unstrap the flask, when suddenly I lose my balance and fall face downward on my saviour's chest. He is beginning to give off a strong smell of putrefaction.

I drink my fill. The water is tepid, but it is still drinkable and there is a lot of it. It will keep me alive a few more days. I remember reading in *The Physiology of Everyday Life* that a man could live without food for over a week so long as he had water. It gave the story of a suicide who had killed himself by starvation. It had taken him a long time to kill himself because he had had water to drink.

What of it? What if I do live another five or six days? Our men have retreated, the Bulgarians have run away. There is no road near by. All the same I'll die. Only instead of three days' agony I have given myself a week. Would it not be better to put an end to it? Next to my neighbour lies his rifle, an excellent English fire-arm. I need only stretch my hand out; then–in a flash–it will all be over. The cartridges lie there, too, all in a heap. He had not had time to use them up.

Well, should I get done with it, or wait? Wait for what? Rescue? Death? Wait until the Turks come and start flaying me, stripping the skin off my wounded legs? Better to put an end to it myself.

But I must not lose heart; I must hold on, fight till my last ounce of strength. If they find me, I am saved. Perhaps my bones are uninjured; they will patch me up. I'll see my country, my mother, Masha. . . .

God, don't let them learn the whole truth! Let them think I was killed on the spot. What will happen to them when they find out that I had been suffering for two, three, four days!

I feel dizzy; that journey to my neighbour has taken it out of me. And that horrible smell, too. How black he has gone . . . what will he be like tomorrow or the day after? I am lying here only because I haven't the strength to drag myself away. I'll have a rest and crawl back to my old place; the wind, by the way, is blowing from that direction and will carry the stink away from me.

I am lying utterly exhausted. The sun is burning my face and hands. I have nothing to cover myself up with. I wish it were night already; it will be the second, I believe.

My thoughts wander, and I drop off.

I slept a long time, because when I woke up it was already night. Everything is the same: my wounds hurt, my neighbour lies there as huge and still as ever.

I can't help thinking about him. Had I given up all that I loved, all that was dear to me, had I made this thousand-mile march out here, suffering from hunger, cold and the blazing heat, did I lie now here in such agony, merely for the sake of taking that poor man's life? What useful military objective had I achieved apart from this murder?

Murder, murder. . . . And who? I!

When I had decided to go and fight, my mother and Masha had not tried to dissuade me, although they had cried over me. Blinded by an idea, I had not seen those

tears. I had not realized (now I do) what I had done to those I love.

What's the use of looking back now! The past is gone and done with.

And how queerly many of my acquaintances had regarded my behaviour! "The man is crazy! He doesn't know what he's letting himself in for!" How could they say that? How do such words tally with *their* notions of heroism, love of country and other such things? To *them* I was the embodiment of all those virtues. And yet they called me "crazy."

And so I went to Kishinev; I was loaded up with a knapsack and all kinds of military equipment. And I went off with thousands of others, among whom you would hardly find more than a few odd men like me, who had volunteered. The rest would have stayed at home if it had depended upon them. Yet they go as we "intelligent ones" go, marching thousands of miles and fighting just as well, if not better than we do. They perform their duties despite the fact that they would immediately drop the whole thing and go away if they only had the chance.

A keen morning wind springs up. The bushes begin to stir, and a sleepy bird takes wing. The stars grow dim. The dark-blue sky pales and becomes flecked with soft fleecy clouds; grey shadows rise from the earth. It is the third day of my.... What can I call it? Life? Agony?

The third.... How many more remained? At any rate very few. I have grown very weak, and I don't think I'll be able to move away from the corpse. Soon we shall be on even terms and won't be objectionable to each other.

I must have a drink. I will drink three times a day—morning, noon and evening.

The sun has risen. Its huge disk, criss-crossed with the black branches of the underbrush, is red, like blood. It is going to be hot today, I think. What is going to happen to

you, neighbour? God knows you are hideous enough as it is!

Yes, he was hideous. His hair had begun to fall out. His skin, which was naturally dark, had become blanched and yellow; the bloated face had drawn it so tight that it had split behind the ear. Worms were swarming there. His booted feet were swollen, and huge blisters pushed out between the hooks. His whole body had distended enormously. What would the sun do to him today?

Lying so close to him was unbearable. I must crawl away at all cost. But could I do it? I can still lift my hand to open the flask and have a drink, but shifting my heavy, inert body? But I must move away, no matter how little—be it even at the rate of half a pace an hour.

I spend the whole of that morning moving away. The pain is bad, but what does it matter now! I no longer remember, I cannot even imagine, what the sensation of a healthy man is. In fact I seem to have got used to the pain. That morning I manage, after all, to crawl away about fifteen feet, and find myself on the old spot. But I was not to enjoy the fresh air for long—if you can call it fresh air within six or seven paces of a decaying corpse. The wind has shifted round and the stench is nauseating. I have a gripping pain in the pit of my empty stomach. The fetid contaminated air keeps flowing over me in sickening waves.

In despair, I start crying. . . .

Utterly worn out and stupefied, I lay almost unconscious. Suddenly. . . . Could it be the fancy of an excited imagination? Hardly. Yes, it was a sound of voices. The tramp of horses' hoofs, human voices. I was about to cry out, but checked myself. What if they were Turks? What then? To these tortures would be added others more horrible, tortures the mere reading about which in the news-

papers makes one's hair stand up on end. They would skin me alive, roast my wounded legs. I might even expect worse; they were so diabolically ingenious. Were it really better to end my life in their hands than to die here? But what if they are our own men? Damn those bushes! Why have you grown all round me in such a thick wall? I can see nothing through them; only in one place a small gap between the branches allows me a glimpse of a hollow in the distance. There is a brook there, I believe—the brook from which we drank before going into battle. Yes, and there is the great slab of sandstone thrown across the brook. They will probably ride over it. The murmur of voices ceases. I cannot make out what language they are speaking—my hearing has grown weaker. God! If it's our men.... I'll shout to them; they will hear me at that distance, surely. Better than running the risk of falling into the clutches of the bashibazouks. But where are they so long? I am in an agony of suspense; I don't even smell the corpse, although the stench of it is as bad as ever.

All of a sudden I catch sight of Cossacks at the crossing of the stream! Blue uniforms, red-striped trousers, lances. Half a *sotnia* of them. At the head a black-bearded officer on a magnificent horse. No sooner had the unit crossed the stream than he turned back in his saddle and shouted: "Forward, at the trot!"

"Stop, for God's sake, stop! Help, brothers, help!" I shout, but the tramp of the heavy horses, the clatter of sabres and the noisy talk of the Cossacks are louder than my hoarse cries—they do not hear me!

Damnation! Exhausted, I fall face downwards on the ground and begin to sob. I have upset the flask and from it flows the water—my life, my salvation, my respite from death. By the time I notice it there is hardly more than half a glass of water left; all the rest has drained away into the dry thirsty earth.

What words can describe the numb stupefaction that came over me after that frightful experience? I lay motionless with half-closed eyes. The wind kept shifting, now blowing fresh clean air upon me, now overpowering me with putrid whiffs. My neighbour that day had become hideous beyond description. Once, when I opened my eyes to glance at him, I was appalled. His face had gone. It had slid off the bones. The ghastly skull, fixed in the eternal grin of death, was more repulsive to me than ever before, although I had often had occasion to handle skulls and anatomize whole heads. This skeleton in uniform with shining buttons made me shudder. "That is war," I thought, "there is its image."

Meanwhile the blazing sun beats down relentlessly. My hands and face are scorched. I have finished the rest of the water. I was suffering so keenly from thirst that I had swallowed it all in a gulp, although I had decided to take only a sip. Ah, why hadn't I shouted to the Cossacks when they were so close to me! Even if they *had* been the Turks it would still be better than this. At most they would have tortured me for an hour, or perhaps two hours; as it is I don't know how long I will have to lie here in this agony. Oh, Mother, darling! Tear your grey hair, beat your head against the wall, curse the day you gave birth to me, curse the world for having invented the scourge of war!

But you and Masha will probably never hear of the tortures I am undergoing. Farewell, Mother, farewell, my sweetheart, my love! Oh, the anguish, the pain! My heart cries out.

Again that white little dog! The janitor had had no pity for it; he had knocked its head against a wall and flung it into the dust hole. But it was still alive. It had suffered the whole day. But I am still more wretched, because I have been suffering for three whole days. Tomorrow will be the fourth, after that the fifth, then the sixth. . . . Death, where are you? Come, come and take me!

But death does not come and does not take me. And I lie under that terrible sun with not a drop of water to cool my burning throat, while the corpse poisons the air around me. It has decomposed completely. Masses of swarming worms drop from it. When he is consumed and only his bones and uniform remain, it will be my turn. And I will be just like that.

The day passes, then the night. No change. Then comes morning. No change. Another day passes. . . .

The bushes stir and rustle, as if holding a whispered conversation. "You will die, sure, sure, sure!" they murmur. "You'll not see, see, see!" answer the bushes from the other side.

"You can't see them here!" a loud voice sounds close by.

With a start I come to myself in an instant. The kindly blue eyes of Yakovlev, our lance-corporal, gaze upon me out of the bushes.

"Spades!" he shouts. "There are two more here—one of ours and one of theirs."

"Don't bring spades, don't bury me, I'm alive!" I want to shout, but only a faint moan escapes my parched lips.

"Good heavens! I think he's alive! Mr. Ivanov, d'you hear me, sir? Boys! Come over here, quick, the gentleman is alive! Call the surgeon!"

Half a minute later water, vodka and some other drink were being poured down my throat. Then everything disappeared.

The stretcher moves forward with a measured swing. The rhythmic movement lulls me. I come to myself and doze off again. My dressed wounds do not hurt me; a delightful languor flows through my body.

"Ha-a-alt! Lower stretchers! Relieving squad, fall in! Stretchers, up! Forward!"

These commands are being issued by Pyotr Ivanovich, our medical officer, a tall, thin, very kind-hearted man. He is so tall that by turning my eyes in his direction I can always see his head with its long straggly beard and his shoulders towering above the heads of the four tall soldiers who are carrying the stretcher on their shoulders.

"Pyotr Ivanovich!" I whisper.

"What is it, my dear boy?" he asks, bending over me.

"What did the doctor tell you, Pyotr Ivanovich? Will I die soon?"

"Die—who ever told you that! You're not going to die. All your bones are whole. You're a lucky fellow! No bones or arteries affected. I can't understand how you managed to survive these three and a half days. What did you eat?"

"Nothing."

"And drink?"

"I took the flask from the Turk. I can't talk now, Pyotr Ivanovich. I'll tell you later."

"Why, of course, my dear chap. Go to sleep."

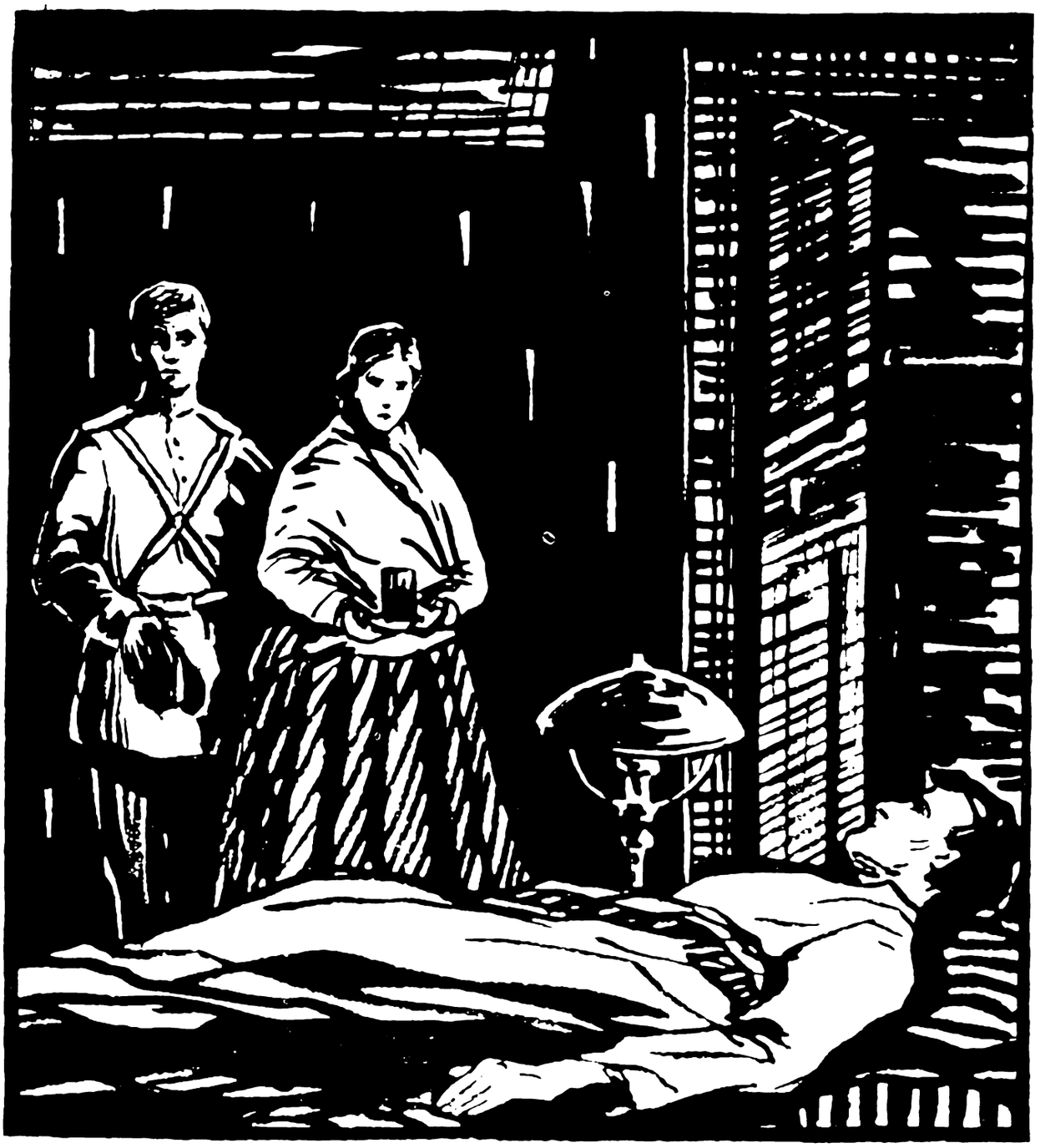
Sleep again, oblivion. . . .

I come to myself in the divisional hospital. Doctors and nurses are standing over me, and among them I see the familiar face of an eminent St. Petersburg professor; he is bending over my legs. His hands are bloody. He is not long at it. Then he turns to me, saying:

"Well, you can thank your lucky stars, young man! You're going to live. We've taken away one of your legs, though; but that's nothing. Are you able to speak?"

I was, and I told them everything I have described here.

1877



THE COWARD

The war worries me very much. I clearly see it dragging on, and when it will end it is hard to predict. Our soldiers are still the same splendid soldiers they always have been, but the enemy, it seems, is by no means as weak as we had thought him to be. It is now four months since war was declared, and still we have not

gained any decisive victory. Yet every day carries off hundreds of lives. I do not know whether it is because my nerves are like that, but the casualty lists affect me much more strongly than they do those around me. A man calmly reads: "Casualties on our side insignificant, such and such officers wounded, among the lower ranks 50 men killed, 100 wounded," and is glad that they are so few, but when I read such a report it immediately brings a whole bloody picture to my mind. Fifty killed and a hundred maimed—and that is called insignificant! Why are we shocked when the papers report a murder involving the lives of only a few people? Why does the sight of bullet-riddled corpses strewing the battle-field horrify us less than the spectacle of a home despoiled by a murderer? Why is it that the Tiligulskaya embankment disaster, which took toll of a score or so of lives, caused a sensation throughout Russia, whereas outpost skirmishes involving "insignificant" losses of the same number of lives barely attract attention?

Lvov, a medical student of my acquaintance, with whom I often have arguments about the war, told me the other day, "Well, Mr. Pacifist, we shall see how those humane convictions of yours will look in practice when you are taken into the army and made to shoot at other men."

"They won't take me into the army, Vasily, because I'm enrolled in the militia."

"But if the war drags on they will start drawing on the militia. Don't you worry, your turn will come, too."

My heart sank. How is it that that thought had never occurred to me before? They certainly would start on the militia, for that matter. "If the war drags on" . . . yes, it probably would. In any case, if this war does not last long, another one will be started. Why not wage war? Why not perform great deeds? I believe that this war is but the prelude to future wars, from which there is no

escape either for myself, my little brother or my sister's baby. My turn will come very soon.

Where will your "I" be then? You protest against war with all your being, but war nevertheless will make you shoulder a rifle and go out to kill and be killed. It's impossible! I, a mild, good-natured young man, who up till now had known only his books, the lecture room, his family and a few close friends, who had been planning in a year or two to begin a new labour, a labour of love and truth; I, moreover, who was accustomed to keep an open mind about the world, accustomed to have it always before me, who thought I understood the evil in it everywhere, and so was able to avoid it—I see the whole edifice of my serenity destroyed, and myself huddling on the very shirt whose rents and stains I had just been examining. And no intellectual development, no awareness of myself and the world, no spiritual freedom can give me wretched physical freedom—freedom to dispose of my own body.

Lvov chuckles when I begin to air my protests against war.

"Don't take things so seriously, my dear fellow, you'll find life easier," he says. "Do you think I like this slaughter? Apart from it being a calamity to everyone I have a personal grudge against it, because it doesn't give me a chance to finish my education. They'll speed up the course and rush us off to amputate arms and legs. But I don't go in for idle speculation on the horrors of war, because no amount of thinking on my part will help do away with it. The best thing really is not to think about it and just go on with your business. And if they do send me to treat the wounded, I'll go and do it. You can't help it, you've got to make a sacrifice at such a time. By the way, do you know that Masha is going out as a nurse?"

"Is she?"

"She made up her mind the day before yesterday, and

today she went to practise dressing. I did nothing to dissuade her; I only asked her what she was going to do about her studies. 'I'll finish them afterwards if I'm still alive,' she says. There's no harm in my sister going, it will do her good."

"What about Kuzma?"

"Kuzma says nothing, he goes about looking as dismal as a funeral, and has dropped his studies altogether. I'm glad for his sake that my sister is going away; the man is just eating his heart out, he follows her about like a shadow, a lost soul. That's what love does!" Vasily Lvov shook his head. "Now, too, he has run off to meet her, as if she has never walked home by herself!"

"I don't think it's right, him living with you, Vasily."

"Of course, it isn't, but who could have foreseen this? The flat is too big for me and my sister—there's a spare room, so why not let it to a nice man?—I thought. And that nice man goes and falls madly in love. To tell you the truth, I'm annoyed with her, too. What's wrong with Kuzma? Isn't he as good as she is? He's a nice, kind-hearted chap, and no fool either. But he might not exist for all the notice she takes of him. However, you better get out of my room, I'm busy. If you want to see my sister and Kuzma you'd better wait in the dining-room, they'll soon be here."

"No, Vasily, I have no time either. Good-bye."

As soon as I stepped out into the street I saw Masha and Kuzma. They were walking along in silence: Masha in front with an air of studied preoccupation, Kuzma a little to one side and behind, as though he dared not walk next to her, and throwing occasional glances at her out of the tail of his eye. They passed me without seeing me.

I cannot do anything, I cannot think about anything. I have read a report about the third battle of Plevna. The casualties are twelve thousand Russians and Rumanians

alone, not counting Turks. Twelve thousand. . . . The figure dances before my eyes in the shape of signs, or stretches in an endless ribbon of corpses lying in a row. Laid shoulder to shoulder they would form a road eight miles long. . . . What is this?

I was told something about Skobelev—about him rushing somewhere, attacking something, taking some redoubt or other, or having it taken from him . . . I don't remember. In all this ghastly business I remember and see only one thing—a heap of corpses, forming a pedestal for mighty deeds to be recorded on the tablets of history. Perhaps that is how it should be—I am no judge; I do not argue about the war, my attitude towards it is the natural impulse of a man shocked by the frightful bloodshed. A bull seeing his own kind butchered before his eyes would probably have a similar feeling. He does not understand what purpose his death will serve, and merely stares at the blood with bulging terror-filled eyes and bellows in a frantic heart-rending voice.

Am I a coward or not?

I was told today that I was. True, I was told that by a very frivolous person in whose presence I had voiced a fear of being taken into the army and had mentioned my unwillingness to fight. Her opinion did not bother me, but it had raised a question: was I not really a coward? Perhaps all my indignation against what everyone considered to be a great cause came merely from a fear for my own skin? What indeed was one unimportant life with such a great cause at stake? And was I capable of risking my life for any cause at all?

Those questions were soon dismissed. I went over my whole life, all those occasions—true, very few—when I had looked danger in the face, and I could not accuse myself of cowardice. I had not been afraid for my life then, and I

was not afraid now. Consequently, it was not death that dismayed me. . . .

More battles, more deaths and sufferings. After reading the newspaper I am incapable of turning my hand to anything: the book is filled with rows of prostrate men instead of letters, and the pen is like a weapon inflicting black wounds upon the white paper. If this goes on much longer I should not be surprised if I start having hallucinations. I now have a new care, though, that has somewhat taken my mind off this ever-present depressing thought.

I went to the Lvovs last night and found them having tea. The brother and sister were sitting at the table, while Kuzma was pacing swiftly from corner to corner, holding his swollen face, which was tied up with a handkerchief.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

He merely waved his hand by way of reply and continued his pacing.

"He had a toothache, and now he's got a big abscess with a swollen cheek," said Masha. "I told him to go and see a doctor, but he wouldn't, and this is the result."

"The doctor will be here soon; I have been for him," said Vasily.

"There was no need to," Kuzma muttered.

"What do you mean, you may have an effusion. And you walk about, although I have asked you to lie down. Do you know what it may lead to?"

"Who cares!" Kuzma muttered.

"Don't be silly, Kuzma Fomich. What do you mean who cares?" Masha said quietly.

The words had a soothing effect upon Kuzma. He even sat down at the table and asked for some tea. Masha poured out a glass and passed it to him. In receiving it from her hands he wore a blissful look so comically incongruous on his swollen face that I could not help smiling. Vasily smiled too. Masha alone looked at Kuzma gravely and compassionately.

The doctor, a bluff jovial man fresh as an apple, arrived. After examining the patient's neck his habitual cheerful expression gave place to a look of concern.

"Let us go into your room; I must examine you properly," he said.

I followed them into Kuzma's room.

The doctor made him get into bed and began to explore the upper part of his chest with careful fingers.

"Well, well, you'll have to stay in bed, my dear sir, and no getting up. Have you any friends who could spare some of their time for you?" the doctor asked.

"I think so," Kuzma answered in a puzzled tone.

"I would ask them," the doctor said, addressing me affably, "to watch by the patient's bedside from this day on, and if anything new develops, to send for me."

He left the room; Vasily saw him out into the passage, where they stood for a long time talking in low tones, while I joined Masha. She was sitting wistfully with her head resting on her hand, slowly stirring her tea with the other hand.

"The doctor has ordered someone to sit with him."

"Why, is there really any danger?" Masha asked, alarmed.

"I suppose so; otherwise there would be no need for sitting with him. You won't mind nursing him, Masha, will you?"

"Of course not! There, you see, I haven't been to the war yet and I have to start nursing already. Let us go in to him; he must be miserable there all alone."

Kuzma greeted us with a smile as much as his swollen cheek would allow.

"That's nice of you," he said. "I thought you had forgotten me already."

"No, Kuzma Fomich, we can't forget you now—we have to sit up with you. See what disobedience leads to," Masha said with a smile.

"Will you, too?" Kuzma asked timidly.

"Yes, only you've got to obey me."

Kuzma shut his eyes and flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, yes," he suddenly said, turning to me; "please give me the looking-glass, will you—it's lying on the table there."

I handed him a round little looking-glass; Kuzma asked me to play the light on him, and with the aid of the glass he examined his swollen cheek and neck. His face darkened, and although we all three tried our best to divert him, he did not utter a word more the whole evening.

Today I was told definitely that the militia would be called up; I had been expecting it, and so the news was not exactly startling.

I could escape the fate I so much feared by making use of certain influential connections to remain in St. Petersburg while at the same time being in the service. They could "fix me up" here, if only as a clerk. But first of all, I hate having to resort to such methods, and secondly, something within me, something that eludes definition, weighs the pros and cons of my position and forbids me to shirk the army. "It's wrong," the inner voice tells me.

Something I never could have expected has happened.

I came this morning to relieve Masha at Kuzma's bedside. She met me at the door, worn out and pale after a sleepless night and with eyes red from weeping.

"What's the matter, Masha?"

"Not so loud, please," she whispered. "You know, it's all over."

"What's all over? He's not dead, is he?"

"Not yet, but there's no hope. Both doctors—we called in another one, you know. . . ."

Her voice choked with tears.

"Go in and have a look at him. Let's go in."

"Dry your eyes first and drink some water, otherwise you will upset him altogether."

"It doesn't matter. It's not as if he doesn't know. He knew it yesterday when he asked for the looking-glass; he was to have been a doctor himself soon."

The heavy odour of the dissecting-room filled the sick chamber. Kuzma's bed had been moved out into the middle of the room. His long legs, big body, and arms stretched down his sides were sharply outlined under the blanket. His eyes were closed, and he breathed slowly and painfully. He seemed to have grown thinner overnight; his clammy face had a sickly colour.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked in a whisper.

"He'll tell you himself. You stay with him, I can't."

She went out, her face buried in her hands, her body racked by stifled sobs, and I sat down by the bed, waiting for Kuzma to wake up. There was a deathly stillness in the room, broken only by the watch ticking out its quiet little song on the bedside table, and by the sick man's slow heavy breathing. I looked at his face and could not recognize it; not that his features had altered so strongly—no; but I saw him in quite a new light. I had known Kuzma for a long time, we were chums (although there had been no particular friendship between us), but never had I had cause to enter into his feelings as I did now. I thought of his life, his failures and his joys as if they had been my own. Up till now, in his love for Masha, I had seen mostly the comical side, but I realized now for the first time how keenly that man must have suffered. "Is his condition really dangerous?" I thought. "It can't be; a man can't die of a stupid toothache. Masha is crying over him, but he'll get better and everything will be well."

He opened his eyes and saw me. Without any change of expression, he began to speak slowly, pausing after each word.

"Hullo . . . so there you are. . . . That's the end of me. . . . Come so suddenly . . . so foolishly. . . ."

"But what's the matter with you, Kuzma, can't you tell me? Perhaps it isn't so bad at all."

"Not so bad, you say? No, my dear chap, it's very bad. The signs are too simple for me to mistake them. Here, have a look!"

Slowly and methodically he turned back the blanket and unbuttoned his shirt. The foul odour of putrefaction assailed me. Beginning from the right side of his neck, over an area the size of one's hand, Kuzma's chest was black as velvet with a slightly livid tinge. It was gangrene.

I have been sitting at the sick man's bedside for four days without closing an eye, taking it in turns with Masha and her brother. Life seemed to be hanging in him by a bare thread, but still refused to quit his strong body. A piece of black dead flesh had been cut out of him and thrown away like a rag, and the doctor had given orders for the great gaping wound left after the operation to be bathed every two hours. Every two hours the two or three of us turn Kuzma over and raise his huge body, uncover the terrible sore and bathe it with a solution of carbolic by means of a rubber tube. It sprays the wound, and Kuzma sometimes finds the strength to smile, because, he says, "it tickles so." Like all people who are seldom ill, he likes to be nursed and tended like a child, and when Masha takes what he calls "the reins"—that is, the rubber tube—into her hands and begins to spray him, he is highly pleased, and says that no one can do it so skilfully as she does, although the tube often shakes in her hands and drenches the whole bed.

What a change in their relations! Masha, who had been something unattainable to him, something he had not even dared to look at, and who had hardly taken any notice of him, was now often to be found weeping quietly at his

bedside when he slept, and nursing him tenderly, while he calmly accepted her attentions as a matter of course, and spoke to her as a father to his little daughter.

Sometimes he suffers very much. His wound burns, and he runs a high fever. At such moments odd thoughts come into my head. I see Kuzma as a mere unit, one of those who go to make up the tens of thousands reported in dispatches. His illness and sufferings are the measure by which I try to gauge the evil caused by the war. How much pain and anguish was here in a single room, a single bed, a single breast—and all this but a drop in the ocean of suffering and sorrow experienced by the vast mass of human beings, who are sent forward, drawn back, and strewn over the fields in heaps of bodies, dead and bleeding, groaning and squirming.

I am utterly worn out by lack of sleep and by depressing thoughts. I must ask Vasily or Masha to sit up for me while I take a nap for at least a couple of hours.

I slept like the dead on the little sofa, and woke up to find somebody shaking me by the shoulder.

"Get up!" said Masha. I jumped up and looked about dazedly. Masha was whispering something to me in a quick panicky voice.

"Patches, new patches!" I made out at last.

"What patches, where?"

"Oh, my God, he doesn't understand! There are new patches on Kuzma. I've sent for the doctor."

"Perhaps it's nothing," I said with the apathy of a man just roused from sleep.

"Nothing? Just have a look!"

Kuzma lay sprawling in a heavy restless sleep, tossing his head from side to side with an occasional low moan. His chest was uncovered, and an inch below the bandaged wound I saw two new black patches. The gangrene had penetrated deeper under the skin, spread under it and

come out in two places. Although I had entertained little hope of Kuzma recovering, the sight of those sinister new signs chased the blood from my face.

Masha sat in a corner of the room with her hands in her lap, looking at me with eyes full of despair.

"You mustn't give way to despair, Masha. The doctor will come and have a look; there may still be some hope. We may still pull him through."

"We shan't, he'll die," she whispered.

"Well, if we don't, he'll die," I answered just as quietly. "It'll be a hard blow to all of us, of course, but you mustn't take on like that—you look half dead yourself these last few days."

"Do you know what torture I have been suffering these days? I can't account for it myself really. I didn't love him, you know, and even now I don't think I love him as much as he loves me, but if he dies it will break my heart. I shall always be thinking of his intent gaze, his constant silence in my company, although he could speak well and liked to talk. I shall always reproach myself in my heart for not having pitied him, for not having appreciated his mind, his heart, his affection. It may sound funny to you, but I am now constantly tormented by the thought that if I had loved him things would be quite different now, everything would have turned out differently, and this terrible ridiculous illness might not have happened. I keep on thinking about it, trying to find excuses for myself, but deep down in my heart something keeps repeating: it's your fault, your fault. . . ."

At this point I glanced at the sick man, fearing that our whispering would wake him, and I saw a change in his countenance. He was awake and had heard what Masha had said, but did not want to show it. His lips quivered, his cheeks flushed and his whole face was radiant, like a damp desolate meadow when the lowering clouds hanging over it part for a moment to let the sun shine out. He must

have forgotten both his illness and his fear of death; one feeling overflowed his heart and brought two tears welling up from under his closed quivering eyelids. Masha stared at him for several moments with a startled kind of look, then she blushed, and with a tender expression on her face she bent over the poor dying man and kissed him.

At that he opened his eyes.

"My God, how I want to live!" he murmured.

And suddenly low sobbing sounds were heard in the room, sounds that struck strangely upon my ear, for never had I heard that man weep before.

I went out. I was on the verge of tears myself.

I do not want to die either, and nor do all those thousands of others. At least Kuzma found some comfort at the end—but those out there? Together with the fear of death and physical suffering Kuzma was experiencing such emotions that he would scarcely have exchanged these sublime minutes of the present for any others in his life. This is quite a different thing! Death is always death, but it is one thing to die among near and loving ones, and another to lie in the mud and your own blood, waiting for them to come and finish you off, or for the guns to come rolling down and crush you like a worm. . . .

"Frankly speaking," the doctor said to me as he put on his coat and galoshes in the hall, "under hospital treatment in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred such patients die. My only hope is that careful nursing and the patient's excellent spirits and eager desire to get well will pull him through."

"Every sick person wishes to get well, doctor."

"Naturally, but your friend has certain intensifying motives," the doctor said with a smile. "Well then, we'll perform an operation this evening—we'll make a new incision for the drainage tubes, so as to give the water better play, and hope for the best."

He shook my hand, buttoned up his bearskin coat, and went off on his round of visits. In the evening he came with his instruments.

"Perhaps you would like to do the operation for the sake of practice, my future colleague?" he said to Lvov.

The latter nodded, rolled up his sleeves, and set about his task with a grim face. I saw him insert into the wound a peculiar instrument with a three-edged blade, saw the blade pierce the body, and Kuzma grip the edge of the bed and grit his teeth with pain.

"Now then, don't be a woman," Lvov said gloomily, inserting the drainage tube into the new incision.

"Does it hurt you very much?" Masha asked kindly.

"Not very much, my dear; I've gone so weak, I'm so worn out."

The wound was dressed, and Kuzma was given some wine, after which he calmed down. The doctor went away. Lvov went into his room to study, and Masha and I started to tidy up the room.

"Tuck in the blanket," Kuzma said in a toneless voice. "There's a draught."

I began to straighten his pillow and the blanket according to his own directions; he was hard to please, and kept assuring me that there was a little opening somewhere near his left elbow through which he could feel the draught. I tried to tuck in the blanket as best I could, but despite all my efforts, he still felt the cold now in his side, now in his feet.

"How awkward you are," he grumbled. "It's blowing in my back again. Let her do it."

He glanced at Masha, and I realized only too clearly why I could not please him.

Masha put down the bottle of medicine she was holding and went up to the bed.

"Shall I do it?"

"Please. . . . That's good . . . now it's warm!"

He watched her while she busied herself with the blanket, then shut his eyes and fell asleep with a childishly happy expression on his haggard face.

"Are you going home?" Masha asked me.

"No, I've had a good sleep and can sit up now. If I'm not wanted, though, I can go."

"Please don't, let us have a little talk at least. My brother is always poring over his books, and I feel so bad, so miserable, sitting alone here with Kuzma when he sleeps, and thinking about him dying!"

"You must be brave, Masha. A nurse is not allowed to cry and have gloomy thoughts."

"I won't cry when I'm a nurse. After all, it will be easier to nurse the wounded than such a close friend."

"You are going then, after all?"

"Yes, of course. I'll go all the same, whether he gets well or dies. I've got used to the idea now and I can't give it up. I want to be doing something good, to leave myself a memory of good bright days."

"Ah, Masha, I'm afraid you won't see anything bright in the war."

"Why not? I'll work—isn't that something bright? I want to do my bit, no matter how little it is."

"Do your bit? Why, doesn't it horrify you? Can this be you, telling me that?"

"It is. Who told you that I love war? Only . . . how shall I put it?—war is an evil; you, and I, and many others think the same; but the trouble is it's inevitable; love it or not, you have to put up with it, and if you don't go and fight, they'll take someone else, and just the same it means a human being crippled or worn out by gruelling marches. I'm afraid you don't understand me—I'm not able to express myself properly. The thing is this: the war, in my opinion, is a *common* sorrow, a *common* suffering, and although it may be all right to evade it, I don't like it."

I was silent. Masha's words had clearly expressed my own vague aversion to the idea of shirking the war. I myself *felt* what she was feeling and thinking, only I *thought* differently.

"Now you're thinking all the time how to try and remain here if they take you into the army," she continued. "My brother told me about it. You know, I like you very much, you are a good man, but I don't like this trait in you."

"I can't help it, Masha. We have different views. Why should I be made to answer for this war? I didn't start it, did I?"

"Neither did those who have died and are now dying at it. They wouldn't have gone either if they could help it, but they couldn't, whereas you can. They are going to fight, but you will remain in St. Petersburg, safe, well, and happy, just because you know people who will be sorry to see a friend of theirs going to the war. It's not for me to judge whether that is right or wrong—but I simply don't like it."

She gave her curly head a vigorous toss and said no more.

It has come at last. I am in the grey, and today I have tasted of the roots of military lore as expressed in the manual of the rifle. My ears still ring with:

"Atten-shun! Form fours! Present arms!"

And I had stood at attention, I had formed fours, and had let my rifle down with a bang. After a while, when I will have sufficiently mastered the art of forming fours, I shall be allotted to an outgoing party; we shall be entrained, transported and distributed to different regiments to replace those who have been killed.

Ah well, what's the difference. It's all over; I don't belong to myself any more, I am swimming with the stream; the best thing now is not to think, not to reason, but to

take life as it comes, without criticism, except perhaps for a howl when it hurts you.

I have been put up in a special compartment of the barracks set apart for the privileged; it has cots in it instead of bunks, but otherwise it is pretty dirty. The unprivileged recruits are much worse off. Until they are assigned to their regiments they live in a vast shed that was once a riding-hall; it had been divided into two storeys by double-tiered berths, the ground covered with straw, and the whole placed at the disposal of its temporary occupants to make the best they could of it. The snow and mud in the centre aisle which everyone keeps bringing in on his feet from outside got mixed with the straw and forms a filthy mess; the straw litter on the sides of the aisle is none too clean either. Several hundred men stand, sit and lie about on it in groups consisting of natives from the same town or district—a real ethnographic exhibition. I found some men from my own district, too. Tall ungainly Ukrainians in new *svitkas* and astrakhan caps lay together in a silent huddle. There were about ten of them.

"How do you do, brothers."

"How do you do."

"Been long from home?"

"About a fortnight. And who may you be?" one of them asked me.

I gave my name. It appeared that they had all heard of it. They brightened up a bit on meeting a fellow countryman and grew more talkative.

"Feeling lonesome?" I asked.

"I should say so! Lonesome isn't the word. At least, if only the grub was decent, it wouldn't be so bad, but it's filthy."

"Where are they going to send you?"

"God knows! Against the Turk, I suppose."

"Do you want to go to the war?"

"What haven't I seen there?"

I began asking about our town, and memories of home loosened the men's tongues. Stories were told about a recent wedding, to pay for which a team of oxen had been sold, and how soon afterwards the young bridegroom had been called up; about the bailiff—"a hundred horsed devils in his throat"; about how scarce land was getting, and how several hundred people had quitted Markovka that year to go out to the Amur. The conversation kept strictly to the subject of the past, not a word being said about the future, about the hardships, dangers and sufferings that lay in store for us all. No one was interested in the Turks, or in the Bulgarians, or in the cause for which he was going out to die.

A tipsy young soldier of the local detachment, who was passing by, stopped, and when I went on speaking again about the war, declared authoritatively: "Those Turks ought to be taught a good lesson."

"Ought they?" I asked, smiling despite myself at the simple assurance.

"Yessir, the very name of the damned heathens ought to be wiped out. They're a lot of dirty rebels, and we've got to suffer through them! If they had behaved decently, I'd be home now, safe and sound with my parents. As it is, they make mischief and we have all the worry. That's how it is, you can take it from me. Let's have a smoke, sir!" he broke off abruptly, coming stiffly to attention with his hand to his cap.

I gave him a cigarette, took leave of my fellow townsfolk, and went home, as I was now off duty.

"They make mischief and we have all the worry," the tipsy voice still rang in my ears. Short and anything but clear, yet what more could one say?

At the Lvovs' the air is thick with misery. Kuzma is in a very bad state, although his wound has cleared; he is run-

ning a terribly high temperature, and is raving and moaning. All these days while I had been arranging my service affairs and was occupied with drills the brother and sister had not left his side. Now that they know I am going, the sister has grown still sadder and the brother gloomier.

"In uniform already!" he greeted me gruffly when I came into his room, which was filled with tobacco smoke and littered with books. "Ah, you people, people. . . ."

"What kind of people, Vasily?"

"You don't let me get on with my studies—that's what. I hardly have any time as it is, they'll send me to fight before I can finish my education; there's such a lot I shall miss learning; and on top of it all, here's you and Kuzma."

"Kuzma is dying, granted, but where do I come in?"

"But aren't you dying, too? If they don't kill you, you'll either go mad or blow your brains out. Don't I know you, and haven't there been examples?"

"What examples? What do you know about it? Tell me, Vasily!"

"Leave me alone. Catch me rubbing it in! It's bad for you. Besides, I don't know anything—I just said it like that."

But I kept at him until I made him tell me his "example."

"A wounded artillery officer told me the story. They marched out from Kishinev in April, soon after war was declared. It had been raining steadily and the roads were washed away; the mud was so deep that the guns and gun-carriages were up to the hubs in it; it got so bad that the horses gave in, and the men had to pull the ordnance out by ropes. During the second stage of the march the road was terrible: twelve hills over a distance of as many miles, with nothing but swamp between. They got stuck. It was pouring, everyone was drenched to the skin, hungry, and played out, but they had to go on pulling. Of course, a man pulled till he pitched into the mud face down,

completely exhausted. At last they came to a place that was so bogged down it was impossible to move a step, but they still went on straining! 'It makes me shudder to think of it!' the officer said. Their surgeon was a young chap, a recent graduate; suffering from nerves. He cried: 'I can't stand the sight of this,' he says, 'I'm going ahead.' And he rode forward. The soldiers cut a mass of branches, enough to build a dam with, and pushed forward again. They dragged the battery to the top of the hill, and saw the surgeon hanging from a tree. There's your example. The man just couldn't bear the sight of all that suffering, so how are you going to stand it?"

"But it's easier to stand the suffering than to kill yourself like that surgeon did, isn't it?"

"Well, I don't see what good there is in being harnessed to a gun-carriage."

"Your conscience won't torment you, Vasily."

"That's too subtle for me, my dear fellow. You'd better have that out with my sister—she's good at that kind of thing. She can pick *Anna Karenina* to pieces for you, discuss Dostoyevsky, and all that. As for this idea, I daresay it has been dealt with in some novel or other. Good-bye, philosopher!"

He laughed good-humouredly and gave me his hand.

"Where are you off to?"

"To Vyborgskaya, the clinic."

I went into Kuzma's room. He was awake and feeling better than usual, as Masha, his constant bedside watcher, told me. He had not seen me in uniform yet, and was disagreeably surprised.

"Are they leaving you here or sending you away to the army?" he asked me.

"Sending me away; why, don't you know?"

He was silent.

"I knew, but I had forgotten. My head and memory are not up to much lately. . . . So you are going then. Good."

"You, too, Kuzma!"

"What about 'me too'? Am I not right? What have you done to deserve a pardon? Go and die! Better men than you, harder workers, are going too. Put my pillow straight, will you . . . that's right."

He spoke quietly and resentfully, as if taking revenge on someone for his illness.

"That's quite true, Kuzma, but am I not going, too? Is it just for my own sake that I am protesting? If that were so, I would remain here without more ado—it could easily be arranged. I am not doing it; I am needed, and so I am going. I don't see though why I can't be allowed to have my own views on the subject."

Kuzma lay staring fixedly at the ceiling as if he had not heard me. At last he slowly turned his head towards me.

"I didn't really mean it," he murmured. "I am worn out and irritable, and really I don't know why I'm trying to find fault with everybody. I've become so peevish; I suppose my time will soon be up."

"Nonsense, Kuzma. Cheer up. Your wound has cleared and is healing, and everything is turning out for the best. You should be talking about life now, not death."

Masha turned her big sad eyes upon me, and I suddenly recalled what she had told me a fortnight ago: "No, he won't get better, he'll die."

"What if I suddenly did get well? Wouldn't that be good!" Kuzma said with a wan smile. "They'd send you away to fight, and Masha and I would go, too: she as a nurse, I as a doctor. And I'll fuss around you when you're wounded like you are fussing around me."

"Now that'll do, Kuzma," said Masha. "Too much talking is bad for you. Besides, your torture hour has come again."

He gave himself up to us; we undressed him, took off the bandages and started work on his great lacerated

chest. And when I directed the spray of fluid on the exposed bloody parts, on the fleshless collar-bone that glistened with a pearly lustre, on the vein passing through the whole wound and lying clean and free, as if this were not a wound in a living body, but an anatomized subject, I thought of other wounds, far more frightful both in quality and appalling quantity, inflicted not by blind senseless chance, but by the deliberate acts of men.

I do not mention a word in this notebook about what is going on at home and what I am suffering. The tears with which my mother greets me when I come and go, the oppressive silence that reigns at table when I am there, the kind attentions of my brothers and sisters—all this is very painful to see and hear, still more to write about. The thought that within a week you will have to give up all that is dearest to you in the world brings the tears to your eyes.

And now at last comes the parting. Our unit is leaving by railway first thing tomorrow morning. I was given leave to spend my last night at home; and now I am sitting alone in my room for the last time! The last time! Does anyone, who has not experienced that last time, know all the bitterness of those two words? For the last time my family have met and said good night, for the last time I have come into this little room and sat down at the desk, illumined by the familiar low lamp and littered with books and paper. For a whole month I had not touched them. I pick up the work I had begun and examine it for the last time. Broken off, it lies there dead, still-born, senseless. Instead of finishing it, you are going with thousands of your kind to the world's end because history requires your physical powers. As for your mental powers, you may forget them—no one wants them. What matter that you have cultivated them for years, planned to apply

them somewhere or other? Some immense organism you know not of, but of which you form an insignificant part, has decided to cut you off and throw you away. And what can you do against such a desire, you-- "a toe off the foot"?

But enough of this. I must try and get some sleep; tomorrow I must be up very early.

I asked that no one should go to see me off. It would only mean more tears. But when I was sitting in the packed railway carriage I felt so unutterably lonely that I would have given anything in the world to have been able to be with someone near, if only for a minute or two. At last came the time for departure, but our train did not move. It was being held up. Half an hour went by, then an hour, and an hour and a half, but we were still standing. In that hour and a half I could have been home and back again. Perhaps someone will come after all.... No, they all believe I had left long ago; they would hardly count on this delay. You never know, though.... And I looked in the direction from where I could expect someone to come. Never had time dragged so drearily.

The shrill notes of a bugle sounding the assembly brought me to myself with a start. The soldiers who had got out of the train and were crowding the platform hastened back to their places. In another moment the train would start, and I would see no one any more.

But I did. The Lvovs, brother and sister, came up to my carriage almost at a run; I was awfully glad to see them. I don't remember what I told them, or what they told me apart from the single phrase, "Kuzma is dead."

Here the entries in the notebook end.

A wide snowy field. All round are white mounds with white hoarfrosted trees on them. The sky is overcast and

low; the thaw can be felt in the air. The crackle of rifles and the steady pounding of guns can be heard; smoke covers one of the mounds and creeps down into the field. Through it can be discerned a dark moving mass, which, on closer inspection, resolves itself into separate black dots. Many of those dots are already motionless, but the others keep moving forward, although they are still a long way from their goal–to be distinguished only by the mass of smoke that pours from it–and although their numbers are dwindling every moment.

The reserve battalion, lying in the snow rifles in hand, watched the movement of the black mass with all its thousand eyes.

"There they go, boys! Ah, they won't make it!"

"What are they keeping us here for? They'd take it in no time if we gave them a hand."

"You're sick of life, I see," an elderly soldier said gloomily. "Lie where you've been put, and thank God you're safe and sound."

"Don't you worry, Dad, we'll all be safe and sound," answered a young soldier with a merry face. "I've been in four fights, and nothing's happened to me! You funk it a bit at first, but afterwards–you'd be surprised! I bet you are saying your prayers, sir, now aren't you?"

The last words were addressed to a lean soldier with a black little beard who was lying next to him.

"What do you want?" the latter said.

"Cheer up, sir!"

"Who told you I need cheering up, my dear man!"

"In case of anything, you stick to me, sir. I've been through it, I know. The gentleman's a sport, though, he won't turn tail. He's not like that other volunteer we once had. D'you know what he did when we went into action just like now and the bullets started whizzing round us? He chucked away his bag and pack and his rifle, and ran

for dear life, but a bullet got him in the back. That will never do—breaking the oath, you know."

"Don't you worry, I won't run away," the "gentleman" answered quietly. "You can't run away from a bullet."

"That's just it! She won't stand any nonsense. . . . Goodness, me! If they haven't stopped!"

The black mass had halted in wreaths of smoke.

"Ekh, they're blazing away at 'em, they'll fall back in a minute. . . . No, they're moving forward. Daze my eyes! Keep it up, come on! My God, look at the wounded dropping! And no one picking them up."

"A bullet! A bullet!" a murmur arose.

Indeed, something swished through the air. It was a stray bullet that had flown over the reserve lines. It was followed by a second and a third.

"Stretcher!" someone shouted.

The stray bullet had found its billet. Four soldiers rushed over to the wounded man with a stretcher. Suddenly the small figures of men and horses appeared on one of the hillsides a little to one side of the point of attack, and a thick round puff of smoke, as white as snow, flew out from there at once.

"They're aiming at us, the swine!" shouted the merry young soldier.

A shell came screaming over and burst with a crash. The merry soldier flung himself face downward in the snow. When he looked up again he saw the "gentleman" sprawling next to him with his arms thrown out and his neck twisted in an unnatural manner. Another stray bullet had pierced a gaping black hole over his right eye.

1879

THE MEETING

The broad track of shimmering moonlight ran out for miles; the rest of the sea was black; the steady boom of the surf breaking upon the sandy beach struck upon the ear of the man standing above; blacker than the sea itself were the silhouettes of the ships riding at anchor in the roads; one huge steamer

("probably an Englishman," thought Vasily Petrovich) lay in the lane of moonlight hissing steam, which escaped in curling wreaths; the air wafted up from the sea had a salty tang; Vasily Petrovich, who had never seen anything like this before, feasted his eyes on the sea, the moonlight, the sailing vessels and steamers, and drew the sea air into his lungs with a zest he had never felt in his life before. He stood for a long time, revelling in these new sensations, his back turned to the city in which he had arrived only that day, and where he was to live for many a year. Behind him a motley crowd was strolling along the boulevard; he caught snatches of Russian and foreign conversation, the quiet dignified voices of the local worthies, the pretty babble of the young ladies, and the boisterous voices of the senior schoolboys clustering around two or three of them. A burst of laughter from one such group made Vasily Petrovich turn round. The gay crowd passed him; one of the youths was saying something to a young schoolgirl; his chums were noisily interrupting what was apparently a vehement apologetic speech.

"Don't you believe him, Nina! He's a liar! He's making it all up!"

"No, really, Nina, it isn't my fault in the least!"

"Look here, Shevyrev, if you ever try to deceive me again . . ." the girl began with affected hauteur in a pretty young voice.

Vasily Petrovich did not catch the rest of the sentence, as the crowd passed out of earshot. Half a minute later another burst of laughter came out of the darkness.

"There is my future field of activity upon which I shall toil like the humble ploughman," thought Vasily Petrovich, first, because he had been appointed to the post of teacher in the local Gymnasium, and secondly, because he had a predilection for figurative thinking even when he did not give it utterance. "Yes, I shall have to labour in

that humble field," he thought, sitting down on the bench, again facing the sea. "Where are thy dreams of a professorship, of journalism, of renown? They were beyond your reach, sir; so now try your hand here!"

And pleasurable thoughts stirred in the head of the new Gymnasium teacher. He thought of how he would discover the "divine spark" in boys from the very first classes at school; of how he would foster those natures "who strove to throw off the yoke of darkness"; of how, under his guidance, the fresh young forces, "free from the dross of this workaday world," would develop; and of how his pupils, in the end, might turn out to be remarkable men. . . . In imagination he even pictured such scenes: he sits, does Vasily Petrovich—now an old grey-headed teacher—in his humble lodgings, and his former pupils come to see him; one of them is a professor of such-and-such a university, "well known both at home and abroad," another is a writer, a famous novelist, a third is a public figure, also a prominent man. And all of them treat him with respect. "It was the good seeds you dropped into my soul when I was a boy that have made me what I am, my dear Vasily Petrovich," says the public figure, wringing the hand of his old teacher with deep emotion.

Vasily Petrovich's mind, however, soon descended from its soaring flight to more earthly things directly connected with his present circumstances. He drew a new wallet out of his pocket, and, after counting his money, began figuring how much he would have left after meeting all the necessary expenses. "What a pity I spent money so recklessly on the way," he thought. "Lodgings . . . well, let us say twenty rubles a month, with meals, laundry, tea, tobacco. At any rate I will be able to save a thousand rubles in six months. Probably one can get lessons at a good price, something round about four or five rubles." He felt well pleased, and was moved to put his hand in his pocket, where lay two letters of introduction to two local

bigwigs, and read the addresses on them for the twentieth time. He drew the letters out, and carefully unwrapped the paper they were folded up in, but he could not read the addresses as the light of the moon was not strong enough to afford Vasily Petrovich that pleasure. A photograph was wrapped up with the letters. Vasily Petrovich held it up towards the moon and tried to make out the familiar features. "Ah, dear Liza!" he breathed the name, and sighed with a not unpleasant feeling. Liza was his fiancée, who had remained in St. Petersburg to wait until Vasily Petrovich had saved up the thousand rubles which the young couple considered necessary to start a home with.

With a sigh, he put the photograph and the letters away in his breast-pocket and fell to dreaming about his future married life. These dreams seemed to him more pleasant even than those about the public figure who was to come and thank him for the goodly seeds which he had planted in his soul.

The sea roared far below and the wind freshened. The Englishman had come out of the luminous lane of moonlight which rippled with thousands of glinting wavelets that grew brighter and brighter as it ran out into the watery waste. Vasily Petrovich was loath to get up from the bench, to tear himself away from this scene and go back to the tiny room in the hotel at which he had put up. But it was already late; he got up and walked down the boulevard.

A gentleman in a light suit of raw silk fabric and a straw hat the crown of which was draped in muslinet (the summer costume of the local dandies) got up from a bench as Vasily Petrovich passed and said to him, "Have you a light, please?"

"Certainly," answered Vasily Petrovich. A red glow lit up a face that was familiar to him.

"Nikolai! You, my friend?"

"Vasily Petrovich?"

"The very same. Oh, I'm so glad! This *is* a surprise!"

said Vasily Petrovich, embracing his friend and kissing him thrice. "What good wind brings you here?"

"I'm working here, that's all. And you?"

"I have been appointed here as a teacher at the Gymnasium. I have just arrived."

"Where are you staying? If at a hotel, then please come down to my place. I'm very glad to see you. You have no friends here, have you? Come along, we'll dine and have a chat and remember the good old days."

"Very well, let us go," Vasily Petrovich agreed. "I am ever so glad! I came out here as if to a desert—and all of a sudden this delightful meeting. Cabman!" he shouted.

"Never mind that, you needn't shout. Sergei, come along there!" Vasily Petrovich's friend said in a loud calm voice.

A smart barouche rolled up to the curb, and its master jumped into it. Vasily Petrovich stood on the pavement and stared at the carriage, the black sleek horses and the fat coachman.

"Are these horses yours, Kudryashov?"

"Yes! Didn't expect it, eh?"

"Amazing.... Is this you?"

"Who else can it be? Come on, get in, we'll have plenty of time to talk."

Vasily Petrovich got into the barouche beside Kudryashov, and the vehicle rolled off, rocking and rattling over the cobbles. Vasily Petrovich leaned back in the soft upholstered seat, swaying and smiling. "Well I never!" he thought. "Not so long ago Kudryashov was the poorest of poor students, and now—a carriage!" Kudryashov, his outstretched feet resting on the front seat, smoked a cigar in silence. After a drive of five minutes the carriage came to a stop.

"Well, old chap, here we are. I'll show you my humble hut," said Kudryashov, stepping off and helping his friend to alight.

Before entering the humble hut the visitor passed his

eye over it. The moon was behind it and did not light it up; therefore, all he noticed was that the house was a single-storey stone-built one with ten or twelve large windows. A penthouse supported by columns with gilded scrolls hung over a massive oak door with plate-glass panels, a bronze handle in the shape of a bird's claw holding a polyhedron, and a gleaming brass plate with the name of the owner on it.

"I like your hut, Kudryashov! It's more like a palazzo, I should say," Vasily Petrovich remarked when they came into the hall with its oak furniture and the black gaping mouth of the fire-place. "Is it your own?"

"No, old chap, it hasn't come to that yet. I rent it. It isn't expensive—fifteen hundred."

"Fifteen hundred!" Vasily Petrovich echoed.

"It's more profitable to pay fifteen hundred than to lay out capital which can yield you much greater interest if it is not converted into property. Besides, you would need a lot of money. If you're going to build, then build something worth while, not a rubbishy thing like this."

"A rubbishy thing!" Vasily Petrovich exclaimed in astonishment.

"Why yes, the house is no good. But come along, hurry up."

Vasily Petrovich, meanwhile, had taken his coat off and was following his host. The appointments of Kudryashov's apartment gave him fresh cause for astonishment. He saw a whole suite of rooms with high ceilings and parqueted floors, and expensive paper hangings embossed in gold; a dining-room done in imitation oak with poor models of wild fowl hung about the walls, with an immense carved wood sideboard and a large round table which received a flood of light from a hanging bronze lamp with an opaque shade; a reception-room with a grand piano and a medley of bentwood furniture, such as settees, benches, stools and chairs, and with expensive lithographs and

cheap oleographs in ornate gilt frames; a drawing-room with the usual collection of furniture upholstered in silk and a mass of gewgaws. It seemed as if the occupant had suddenly come into a large fortune, won two hundred thousand, say, and had decided to cut a dash by hastily fitting up for himself a sumptuous flat. It seemed as if everything here had been purchased in a lump, not because there had been any need to do so, but because the owner was flush of money, which had found an outlet in the purchase of a grand piano on which, as far as Vasily Petrovich knew, his friend could only play with one finger; of a bad old picture, one of tens of thousands ascribed to a second-rate Flemish painter, which no one probably ever looked at; of a set of chess figures of Chinese workmanship, which could not be used because they were so delicate and fragile, but the heads of which had three tiny balls carved out in them, one within another—and a multitude of other unnecessary things.

The friends went into the study. Here it was cosier. A large desk, encumbered with a variety of bronze and china knicknacks and littered with papers and drawing accessories, occupied the middle of the room. On the walls hung huge coloured drawings and charts, and under them stood two low ottomans with silk cushions. Kudryashov put his arm round Vasily Petrovich, led him straight up to the couch and made him sit down on the soft cushions.

"Well, I am glad, very glad to have met an old chum," he said.

"So am I. You know, I came here as if to a desert, and all of a sudden—this meeting! Do you know, Kudryashov, the sight of you has stirred so many memories, touched so many chords. . . ."

"What memories?"

"And you ask? Why, memories of our student days, those blessed days when we lived so well—spiritually if not materially. D'you remember—"

"Remember what? How we used to eat dog's sausage? I've had enough of that, old chap. Care for a cigar? Regalia Imperialia, or whatever it's called; I only know they cost half a ruble a piece."

Vasily Petrovich took the proffered treasure out of a box, drew a penknife from his pocket, cut off the tip of the cigar, lit up, and said:

"I'm absolutely in a dream, Kudryashov. Such a post in a matter of a few years."

"Post nothing! It isn't worth a tinker's damn, old chap."

"What do you mean? How much are you getting?"

"What? Pay?"

"Well yes, salary."

"My salary—that of Engineer Kudryashov, civil servant grade two—amounts to one thousand six hundred a year."

Vasily Petrovich's face fell.

"But how is that? Then where does all this come from?"

"Ah, what simplicity! Where does this come from? From water and earth, from sea and land. But mainly from here," his friend answered, tapping his head. "Do you see those pictures on the walls?"

"Yes," said Vasily Petrovich. "Well?"

"D'you know what they are?"

"No."

Vasily Petrovich got up from the ottoman and went over to the wall. The blue, red, brown and black shading conveyed nothing to his mind, nor did the mysterious figures beside the dotted lines done in red ink.

"What are they? Technical drawings?"

"Yes, but drawings of what?"

"I really don't know."

"Those drawings, my dear Vasily Petrovich, represent a future mole. Do you know what a mole is?"

"Yes, of course. After all I'm a teacher of Russian. A mole is a . . . a kind of . . . well, a breakwater, I should say."

"A breakwater is right. A breakwater serving to form a harbour. Those drawings represent a mole which is now under construction. You saw the sea from above, didn't you?"

"Why, yes! A wonderful scene! But I didn't notice any structures."

"I should be surprised if you did," Kudryashov said with a laugh. "That mole is almost right out of the sea, Vasily Petrovich—it exists here, on dry land."

"Where is that?"

"Here with me and other builders—with Knoblokh, Puitsikovsky and the rest of them. This is between ourselves, naturally; I am telling you because you're an old chum. What are you staring at me like that for? It's quite a usual thing."

"But, look here, this is really shocking! Do you mean to say it's true? Do you mean to say you have no scruples about using dishonest means to attain this comfort? Do you mean to say all the past was merely a stepping-stone to . . . to this. . . . And you can calmly talk about it?"

"Hold on, Vasily Petrovich! No harsh words, please. You say 'dishonest means'? Will you first be good enough to tell me the meaning of honest and dishonest. I don't seem to remember it; perhaps I have forgotten, but I rather think I never remembered; what's more, it seems to me that you don't remember either, and are just acting a part. Drop it, anyway; for one thing it isn't polite. You ought to respect freedom of opinion. You say it's dishonest; you can say what you like, but don't scold. I'm not abusing you for not being of my opinion, am I? It's purely a matter of point of view, old chap, and there are so many of those points that they're really not worth bothering our heads about. Let's go into the dining-room to drink vodka and talk of pleasant things."

"Ah, Nikolai, Nikolai, it grieves me to look at you."

"No harm in that; you can grieve as much as you like.

No matter if it hurts, you'll get over it! You'll get used to it in time. You'll say, 'But what a ninny I was.' You will, take my word for it. Come on, let's have a drink and forget about erring engineers. What's a man been given brains for if not to err, old chap? Now how much will you get, my dear teacher, eh?"

"What is that to you?"

"No, tell me."

"Well, with private lessons, I'll earn about three thousand."

"There, you see: for a wretched three thousand you'll trudge about after private lessons all your life! But I just sit and look around: if I feel like doing anything I do it, if I don't, I don't; if I should take it into my head to do nothing all day but twiddle my thumbs, I twiddle them. As for money—I have so much of it that it is to me a 'trifle light as air.' "

In the dining-room, which they entered, the table had been laid for supper. Cold roast beef lay piled up in a pink heap. Tinned foods with varicoloured English inscriptions and gaudy pictures made a colourful display. An array of bottles stood on the table. The friends drank a glass of vodka and addressed themselves to the food. Kudryashov ate with slow relish, completely absorbed in what he was doing.

Vasily Petrovich ate and thought, thought and ate. He was greatly put out and utterly at a loss. According to the beliefs which he held, he should have beaten a hasty retreat from the house of his old friend never to return to it. "This piece I am now eating has been stolen," he thought, as he put a piece into his mouth and took a sip at the glass of wine which his amiable host had replenished. "And what am I doing if not acting meanly?" Many such definitions stirred in the poor teacher's mind, but definitions they remained, and behind each definition lurked a secret voice, as it were, which expostulated: "Well, what of it?"

Vasily Petrovich felt inadequate to deal with the problem, and continued to sit there. "Very well, I shall observe things," the thought crossed his mind by way of self-justification, but the very next minute he felt ashamed of himself. "Why should I observe things, I am not a writer, am I?"

"Jolly good meat, that—have you noticed?" said Kudryashov. "Won't get meat like that if you searched the town."

And he told Vasily Petrovich a long story about how he had been dining at Knoblokh's, how the roast beef served there had struck him with its excellence, how he had found out where it had come from, and how he had managed to get some himself.

"You've come just at the right moment," he said, concluding his story about the meat. "Have you ever had anything like it?"

"It *is* excellent roast beef," answered Vasily Petrovich.

"Superexcellent, old chap! I like everything to be just so. But why aren't you drinking? Wait a minute, try some of this wine."

There followed another story of equal length about wine in which there featured an English skipper, a commercial house in London, our old acquaintance Knoblokh, and the customs. While talking about the wine, Kudryashov drank it, and the more he drank the livelier he grew. A flush mounted the cheeks of his apathetic face, and his speech quickened and became more animated.

"But why are you silent?" he broke off at last to ask Vasily Petrovich, who had indeed maintained a stony silence throughout the epic narratives about the meat, the wine, the cheese and the other good things that adorned the engineer's table in such abundance.

"I don't know, old chap, I just don't feel like talking."

"Don't feel like talking. . . . What nonsense! You are still fretting over my confession, I see. I'm sorry that I

ever told you, very sorry; we'd have had a most pleasant supper but for that confounded mole. Just don't think about it, Vasily Petrovich, forget it. . . . Eh? Come on, Vasya! It can't be helped, old chap, I haven't come up to scratch, I know. Life isn't school. I am not so sure that you'll stick to your path for very long either."

"Please don't make surmises about me," said Vasily Petrovich.

"Offended? Of course you won't stick to it. What good has your unselfishness done you? Are you easy in your mind? Don't you worry every day as to whether your conduct squares with your ideals, and isn't it brought home to you every day that it does not? Now isn't that true? Have some wine, it's good stuff."

He filled his own glass, too, held it up to the light, tasted it, smacked his lips and drained it.

"You think I don't know what's passing in your mind right now, my dear fellow? I know perfectly well. You're thinking, now what the dickens am I sitting with this man for? As if I can't do without his wine and cigars! Wait a minute, let me finish! I don't for a moment think that you are sitting here with me because of the wine and cigars. Not at all; you wouldn't go dinner-hunting even though you *were* keen on them. Dinner-hunting is a nasty thing. You're sitting here and talking to me simply because you can't make up your mind whether I'm a criminal or not. I don't shock you, that's what it is. Of course, you must feel it badly, because you have all your convictions pigeonholed in your mind, and according to that classification I, your old chum and friend, turn out to be a bad egg, but on the other hand, you can't find it in your heart to hate me. Convictions are all right as far as they go, but you can't get away from the fact that I am a chum, a sport, you might even say a good soul. You know perfectly well that I am incapable of doing anyone harm."

"But wait a minute, Kudryashov. Where does all this come from?" Vasily Petrovich said with a sweeping gesture. "You said yourself it wasn't yours. Then the one whom it has been stolen from has been wronged."

"It is easy to say—whom it has been stolen from. I've been thinking and thinking whom I could have wronged, but I have not been able to make it out yet. You don't understand how these things are done; I'll tell you, and then perhaps you'll agree with me that it isn't so easy to find the wronged victim."

Kudryashov rang a bell. An impassive liveried figure in black made its appearance.

"Fetch the drawing from my study, Ivan—the one hanging between the windows. You'll see what a tremendous job it is, Vasily Petrovich. As a matter of fact, I have begun to find poesy in it lately."

Ivan carefully brought in a huge sheet of drawing paper pasted on calico. Kudryashov took it, pushed aside the plates, bottles and glasses, and spread the drawing on the wine-stained table-cloth.

"Look here," he said. "This is a cross-section of our mole, and that is its longitudinal section. D'you see that blue shade? That's the sea. Its depth here is so great that you can't start building up the masonry from the sea floor; what we have to do first is to prepare a bed for the mole."

"A bed?" said Vasily Petrovich. "What a strange name."

"A bed of stone, made up of huge cobbles no less than a cubic foot in dimension." Kudryashov unscrewed a tiny pair of silver compasses from his watch key and measured off a short line with them on the drawing. "Look, Vasily Petrovich, that's a sagene.* If we measure the width of the bed with this we shall find it just a little short of fifty sagenes. You wouldn't call that a narrow bed, would you?

* Sagene—old Russian measure equal to 7 feet.

This masonry is built up from the floor to within sixteen feet of the sea's surface. If you can imagine the width of this bed and its enormous length you will have some idea of the gigantic mass of masonry involved. You know, barge after barge keeps coming up to the breakwater the whole day long, dumping its load overboard, but when you measure it the build-up is infinitesimal. It's like throwing stones into an abyss. Here in the plan you see the bed a dingy grey. While it is being run out, other work has been started on it ashore. Enormous artificial stones, solid blocks of stone and cement, are lowered on to the bed by means of steam cranes. Every such block is the size of a cubic sagene and weighs hundreds of poods. They are raised by steam, turned about and laid down in rows. Making this mass move up or down at your own will by a mere light pressure of your hand gives you an odd sensation. When a mass like that obeys your will, you feel how mighty man is.... Here are those blocks, see." He indicated them with his compasses. "This masonry is built up to just a little below the surface of the sea, and after that the top dressing of squared stone is started on. It's a big job, you see—quite as big as any of the Egyptian pyramids. There you have a general idea of the work which has been dragging on for several years already, and will drag on for God knows how many more. The longer the better. Anyway, if it goes on the way it has been doing lately it will last our time very likely."

"Well, what then?" Vasily Petrovich asked after a long silence.

"Nothing. We shall sit where we are and receive what is coming to us."

"I still don't see what the receiving possibilities are."

"You're too young, that's your trouble. Come to think of it, though, we are of the same age, but the experience that you lack has made me old and wise. The thing is this: every sea, as you know, has its storms. Well, it's these

storms that do it. They wash away the bed every year, and we have to build a new one."

"I still don't see any possibility of--"

"We build it," Kudryashov coolly proceeded, "on paper, on this drawing here, because it is only on paper that it is washed away."

Vasily Petrovich looked blank.

"Because you can't really expect waves that are only eight feet high to wash away a masonry bed. This sea is not an ocean, and even there breakwaters like ours stand the stress of weather; what's more, here with us, at a depth of about fifteen feet, where the bed ends, you have almost a dead calm. This is how things are done, Vasily Petrovich, just listen. In the spring, after the autumn and winter storms, we get together and decide the question of how much bed has been washed away that year. We take the drawings and mark them off. And then we write to the proper authorities—so many cubic sagenes of masonry washed away by the storms. They write back: go on building, and mending, damn you! And we do."

"But what do you mend?"

"Our pockets, of course," said Kudryashov, laughing at his own witticism.

"That's impossible, impossible!" cried Vasily Petrovich, jumping from his chair and running up and down the room. "Look here, Kudryashov, you are ruining yourself. I say nothing of the immorality of it. . . . I mean that you will all be caught in the end, you'll be ruined, they'll deport you to Siberia. My God, to think of all those hopes and dreams! An honest capable youth—and suddenly. . . ."

Vasily Petrovich went off into an ecstasy, and spoke long and fervently. But Kudryashov smoked his cigar with unruffled calm, and glanced from time to time at his overwrought friend.

"Yes, you'll be deported to Siberia!" Vasily Petrovich ended his philippic.

"It's a very far cry to Siberia, my friend. You *are* a funny chap—you don't understand a thing. Am I the only one who is—how can I express it more delicately—who is benefiting? Everyone around you, the very air you breathe seems to be grabbing. Only recently a novice came along and started a correspondence here on the honesty line. And what happened? We quashed him. And we'll always quash them. All for one and one for all. You think a man's his own enemy? Who will dare touch me when he knows it may be his own undoing?"

"Consequently, as Krylov has it, all the snouts have fluff on them?"*

"Fluff is right. Everyone takes what he can from life, there's no platonic love about it. Now what were we talking about? Ah, yes, the people I have wronged. Tell me whom? The underdogs? Well, in what way? It's not as if I'm drawing directly from the source, I'm taking what has already been drawn, and if I don't get it someone else will—someone perhaps worse than I. At least I don't live like a pig, and even have certain spiritual interests: I subscribe to a mass of newspapers and journals. People shout about science, and civilization, but what application would your civilization have if it were not for us men of means? And who would enable science to advance if not men of means? But you've got to get those means somewhere. Those so-called honest ways——"

"Oh, don't finish it, Kudryashov, don't say the last word for goodness' sake!"

"Word? Would you rather I told lies or made excuses, you old hypocrite? We're stealing, do you hear? And if we're going to speak the truth, then you are stealing, too."

"I say, Kudryashov—"

"What can you say," Kudryashov interrupted with a laugh. "You're a robber, old chap, that's what you are. A

* Meaning telltale signs of guilt. From a fable by Krylov *Trans.*

robber in the garb of virtue. Just *what* is this occupation of yours–teaching? Will you be earning even that miserable salary which you are now receiving? Will you give the world a single decent person? Three-quarters of your pupils will come out men like me, and the remaining quarter men like you, that is well-meaning softies. Now tell me, frankly, aren't you just taking money for nothing? And is there such a great difference between us? You fly your kites high, don't you, preaching honesty!"

"Kudryashov! Believe me, this conversation is very painful to me."

"To me it isn't."

"I did not expect to find in you what I have found."

"It's not surprising; people change, and I have changed, too, but in what direction, you could hardly be expected to guess; you're not a prophet."

"You don't have to be a prophet to hope that an honest youth will become an honest citizen."

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't say that word to me. An honest citizen! What textbook or archives did you drag that musty old relic out of? It's about time you stopped being sentimental–you're not a boy, you know. I tell you what, Vasya," Kudryashov said, taking his friend's arm, "let's drop this confounded subject, there's a good chap. Let's have a drink for comradeship. Ivan! Another bottle of this stuff."

Ivan immediately appeared with another bottle. Kudryashov filled the glasses.

"Well, here's to the prosperity of . . . of what shall we say? Oh, it's all the same–here's to our prosperity–yours and mine."

"I drink," Vasily Petrovich said with feeling, "to you coming to your senses. It's the greatest desire I have."

"Don't mention it, there's a good chap. If I come to my senses I won't be able to drink any more–I'll starve. See what logic yours is. Let's just drink without any wish-

ing, and let's drop this dreary rigmarole; all the same we'll never agree: you won't set me right, and I won't out-argue you. It's not worth arguing about, anyway; you'll come round to my philosophy yourself one day."

"Never!" Vasily Petrovich exclaimed vehemently, banging his glass down on the table.

"Well, we'll see. But here am I talking about myself all the time, and you haven't said a word about yourself! What have you been doing, what are your plans?"

"I told you already, I've been appointed teacher here."

"Is this your first situation?"

"Yes. Up till now I had private lessons."

"Do you still intend to carry on with them?"

"If I can get them, why not."

"We'll get them for you, old chap!" Kudryashov said, slapping Vasily Petrovich on the back. "We'll give you the tutelage of all the local youth. How much did you charge per hour in St. Petersburg?"

"Not much. It was very hard to get good lessons there. A ruble or two, not more."

"Fancy a man working himself to death over such a piddling sum! Don't you dare ask less than five here. It's hard work; I remember running about coaching when I was in my first and second year. I'd hunt out a lesson at fifty kopeks an hour, and be glad to get it. It's the most thankless and difficult task. I'll introduce you to all our crowd; there are some very nice families here, some of them with girls. If you behave sensibly, I'll arrange a match for you if you like. What do you say, Vasily Petrovich?"

"Thanks, I don't need your services."

"What, are you engaged already? Really?"

Vasily Petrovich looked embarrassed.

"I can read it in your eyes. Well, my congratulations, old chap. You've lost no time, have you! Well, well! Ivan!" Kudryashov shouted.

Ivan appeared in the doorway looking sleepy and sulky.

"Let's have some champagne!"

"There isn't any, it's all gone," the servant answered sullenly.

"It's enough, Kudryashov, really!"

"Shut up; I'm not asking you. Are you trying to insult me, or what? Look here, Ivan, don't you come back without champagne, d'you hear! Off you go!"

"But the shop's closed, Nikolai Konstantinovich."

"Don't argue. You have money—go and fetch it."

The servant went away, muttering under his breath.

"Cheeky devil, stands there arguing! And you're a fine one too—'it's enough, Kudryashov.' If this isn't an occasion for champagne, then what is champagne for! Well, who is she?"

"Who?"

"Well, the girl, your fiancée. Is she poor, rich, good-looking?"

"You don't know her all the same, her name will tell you nothing. She has no fortune, and as for beauty—that's a relative thing. I think she's beautiful."

"Have you got a photograph of her?" Kudryashov asked. "I bet you wear it next to your heart. Show me!" He held his hand out.

Vasily Petrovich's face, flushed with wine, grew still redder. Hardly knowing why, he unbuttoned his frock-coat, drew out his wallet, and got out the precious photograph. Kudryashov seized it and began to examine it.

"Not bad, old chap! You know what's what."

"I'd ask you please not to use such expressions!" Vasily Petrovich said sharply. "Let me have it back."

"Wait a minute, let me feast my eyes. Well, I wish you joy. There, there, take it, put it back against your heart. Oh, you *are* a funny man!" Kudryashov cried and burst out laughing.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at!"

"I just thought it funny, old chap. I imagined you ten years hence; yourself in a dressing-gown, a pregnant wife who has lost her good looks, seven children and very little money with which to buy them boots, knickers, caps and all the rest of it. The prose of life. I wonder whether you'll carry that photograph about in your breast pocket then? Ha, ha, ha!"

"What sort of poetry lies in store for you, I'd like to know? To receive money and run through it? To eat, drink and sleep?"

"Not to eat, drink and sleep, but to live. To live with the knowledge of your freedom and to some extent even power."

"Power! What power have you?"

"There is power in money, and I have the money. I do what I please. If I fancy buying you, I'll buy you."

"Kudryashov!"

"Don't put on airs. Can't two old friends like you and I have a joke at each other's expense? I won't buy you, of course. Live your own way. Still, I do what I please. Oh, what a fool, what a fool I am!" Kudryashov suddenly exclaimed, slapping his forehead. "We've been sitting here all this time and I haven't shown you the chief sight. You say—eat, drink and sleep? I'll show you something that will make you eat your words. Come along. Take a candle."

"Where are we going?" asked Vasily Petrovich.

"Follow me. You'll see where."

Getting up from his chair, Vasily Petrovich felt a bit queer and off balance. His legs obeyed him rather reluctantly, and he could not hold the candlestick without the stearine dripping on to the carpet. However, he got his rebellious limbs somewhat under control and followed Kudryashov. They passed through several rooms, and down a narrow passage, and came to a damp dark room. Their footsteps rang hollowly on the stone floor. The

sound of falling water murmured like a ceaseless chord. Stalactites of tuff and bluish glass hung from the ceiling; artificial rocks towered here and there, covered with a mass of tropical vegetation, amid which there was an occasional gleam as of a dark mirror.

"What is this?" asked Vasily Petrovich.

"An aquarium, to which I have devoted two years of my time and a lot of money. Wait a minute, I'll light it up."

Kudryashov disappeared behind some tropical plant, and Vasily Petrovich went up to one of the mirrors, which proved to be a plate-glass window, and looked through it. The light of the candle was too feeble to penetrate deep into the water, but the fishes, large and small, attracted by the spot of light, collected round the illumined place and stared dully at Vasily Petrovich with round eyes, opening and closing their mouths and stirring their fins and gills. Farther loomed the dark outlines of water plants, with some loathsome creature wriggling about among them; Vasily Petrovich could not make out its shape.

Suddenly a flood of blinding light made him shut his eyes for a moment, and when he opened them again he could hardly recognize the aquarium. Kudryashov had lighted electric lamps in two places. Their light passed through the mass of bluish water, which swarmed with fishes and other living creatures, and was filled with plants, whose blood-red, brown and dingy green silhouettes stood out sharply against the dim background. The rocks and tropical plants, looking still darker by contrast, made a pretty border around the thick plate-glass windows through which a view of the interior was disclosed. Everything within the aquarium came to darting life, startled by the dazzling light: a shoal of big-headed little chubs rushed hither and thither, turning as if at a command; sterlets wriggled about with their snouts pressed against the glass, then rose to the surface and sank to the bottom,

as though trying to escape through the transparent solid barrier; a smooth black eel buried itself in the sand of the aquarium, raising a cloud of muddy sediment; a comical dock-tailed cuttlefish disengaged itself from the rock to which it had been clinging and swam across the aquarium in jerks, its long tentacles trailing behind it. Altogether it was so beautiful and novel that Vasily Petrovich stood lost in admiration.

"How do you like it?" Kudryashov said, reappearing at his side.

"Wonderful, old chap, remarkable! How on earth did you arrange it all! Such taste, such striking effect!"

"Don't forget to add knowledge. I went specially to Berlin to see the local wonder-aquarium, and without boasting I can say that although mine of course is inferior in size, it does not yield to it in the least in beauty and interest. It's my pride and comfort. When I feel bored I come here, sit down and look at it for hours. I love all these creatures for being frank—not like us humans. They devour each other and have no qualms about it. Look, do you see that fellow running down his prey?"

A little fish was darting about frantically, fleeing before some long-bodied voracious enemy. In mortal terror it tried to fling itself out of the water and hide under the jutting rocks, but everywhere the sharp teeth pursued it. The rapacious enemy was about to seize it when another came darting in from the side and snapped up the prey: the little fish disappeared in its jaws. The pursuer stopped bewildered, while the thief vanished in a dark corner.

"Grabbed it from under his nose!" said Kudryashov. "The fool, he's lost it! You'd be surprised how much of this small fry they devour: today you let in a mass of them, and the next day they're all eaten up. They eat them up and don't give a thought about whether it's moral or immoral, but we? I've only recently grown out of that stupid

habit, Vasily Petrovich. Don't you agree with me yet that it is stupid?"

"What is?" said Vasily Petrovich, still staring at the water.

"The pricks of conscience, I mean. What's the use? When a tasty morsel comes your way you just grab it, conscience or no. I have done away with them, those pricks of conscience, and try to take after these beasts."

And he pointed to the aquarium.

"You are free to do as you please," Vasily Petrovich said with a sigh. "Those are sea plants and sea animals, I believe?"

"Yes. The water comes from the sea, too. I have had it specially laid on."

"Have you really? It must cost an enormous lot of money."

"It's none too cheap. My aquarium costs me nearly thirty thousand."

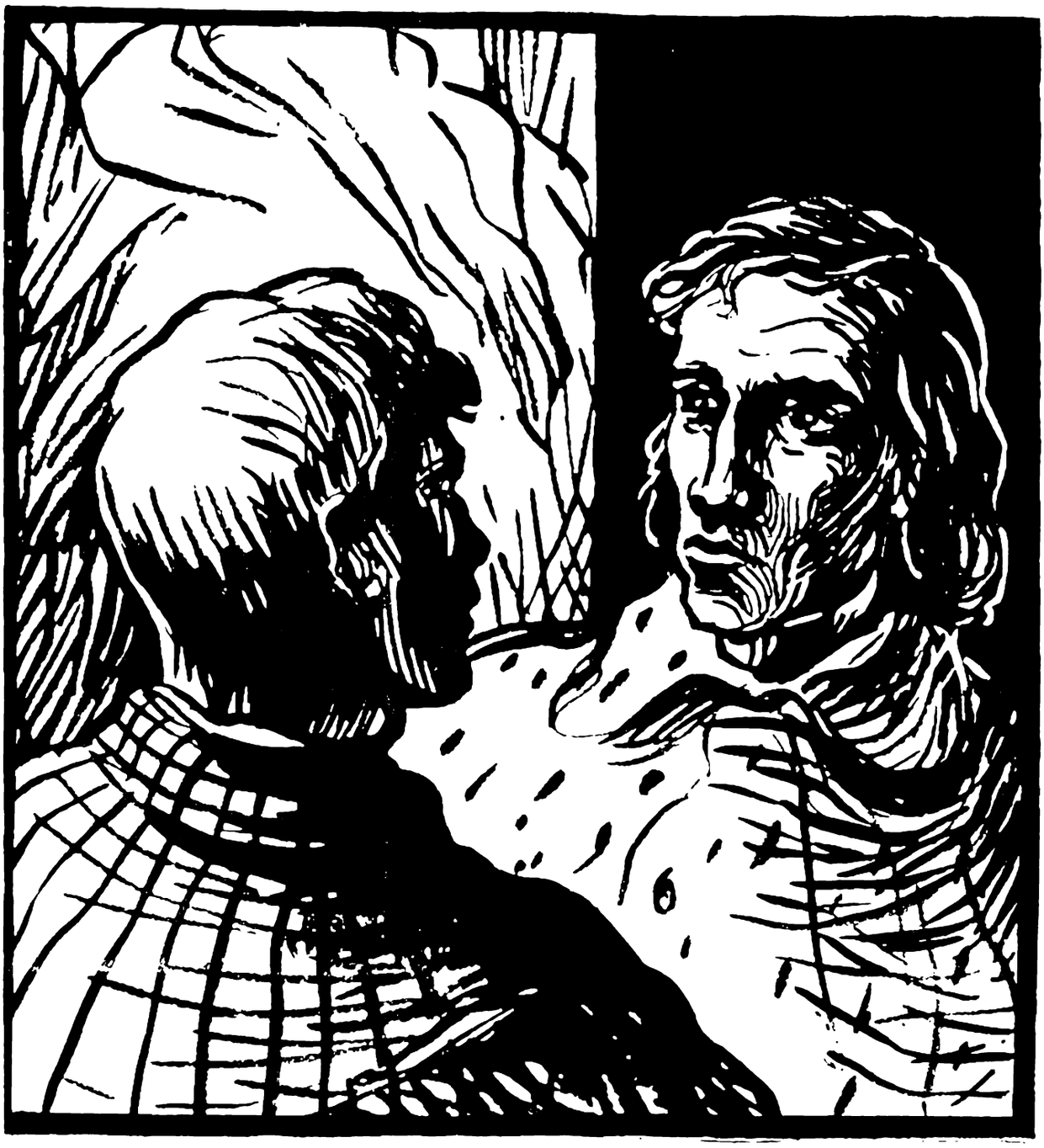
"Thirty thousand!" Vasily Petrovich exclaimed, aghast. "With a salary of only a thousand six hundred!"

"Oh, drop that horrification! If you've seen enough of this, let's go. Ivan must have brought what I asked him. Just a moment, I'll switch off the current."

The aquarium was plunged in darkness again. The candle, which was still burning, seemed a dim smoky light to Vasily Petrovich.

When they came into the dining-room they found Ivan standing ready there with a bottle swathed in a napkin.

1879



ARTISTS

I

DEDOV

Today I feel as though a tremendous load had been taken off my mind. The good luck was so unexpected! To hell with my engineer's uniform, to hell with my instruments and estimates!

But is it not a shame to rejoice at the death of my poor aunt, just because she left me a legacy that enables me to give up the service? True, it was her dying wish that I should devote myself entirely to my favourite occupation, and I am glad now that I am able, among other things, to fulfil her ardent desire. That was yesterday.... How astonished our chief looked when he heard that I was giving up my post! And when I explained what I was doing it for he simply stared at me open-mouthed.

"For love of art? H'm! Hand in your application."

And without a word more he turned and went away. But that was all I needed. I was free, I was an artist! Was not that the height of bliss?

I wanted to get away from people and from St. Petersburg, so I took a boat and went out for a run along the seashore. The water, the sky, the city gleaming in the sun from afar, the blue woods skirting the shores of the bay, the mast tops in the Kronstadt roads, the dozens of steamboats and gliding sailing vessels that flew past me—all appeared to me in a new light. All this was mine, all was within my power, I could snatch it all, fling it upon the canvas, and set it before the mob, fascinated by the spell of art. True, one ought not to sell the bearskin before one has caught the bear; so far I could hardly be called a great artist.

The boat swiftly cleaved the smooth sheet of water. The boatman, a tall, strong, handsome young man in a crimson shirt, steadily plied the oars, swinging his body backward and forward, and propelling the boat with powerful strokes. The sinking sun played upon his face and shirt with such striking effect that I was moved to make a sketch of him in colours. My little box containing canvases, paints and brushes was always with me.

"Stop rowing and sit still for a minute while I paint you," I said.

He lay on the oars.

"Sit as though you were feathering the oars."

He swung the oars back like a bird spreading its wings and froze in that beautiful attitude. I dashed off a pencil outline and began painting. I mixed the colours with a peculiar sense of joy. I knew that nothing would tear me away from them as long as I lived.

The boatman quickly began to tire; the dashing expression of his face gave place to a dull apathetic look. He began to yawn, and once even wiped his face with his sleeve, to do which he had to bend his head down to the oar. The folds of his shirt were lost. What a nuisance! I hate when my model moves.

"Can't you sit still, old chap!"

He grinned.

"What are you laughing at?"

"It's so funny, sir!" he said with a sheepish smile.

"What's funny about it?"

"Painting me as if I was a rarity or something. Like a picture."

"That's what it's going to be, my friend—a picture."

"What do you want it for?"

"For practice. After I have painted small ones for a time, I shall start painting big ones."

"Big ones?"

"Yes, as big as three sagenes."

He was silent, then asked gravely:

"I daresay you can paint sacred images, too?"

"I can, but I'd rather paint pictures."

"I see."

He let that sink in, then asked again:

"What are they for?"

"What are what for?"

"These pictures. . . ."

Naturally, I did not start delivering him a lecture about the purpose of art, but merely said that these pictures sold for good money—as much as a thousand, two thousand

and even more a piece. The boatman's curiosity was gratified and he asked no more questions. The sketch was an excellent one (those warm tones of red calico illumined by the setting sun are lovely), and I returned home perfectly happy.

II

RYABININ

Before me, in a strained attitude, stands old Taras, the model, whom Professor X– had told to put his "hant on der head," because it was supposed to be "a fery classical pose." I am in the midst of a crowd of classmates, all of whom are sitting, like me, before their easels, palette and brush in hand. Right in front sits Dedov, painting Taras with great zeal, although he is a landscape painter. A deep hush reigns in the class-room, which is filled with the odours of paint, oil and turpentine. Every half hour Taras is given a rest; he sits down on the edge of the packing case that serves him as a pedestal, and the "model" becomes just an ordinary naked old man, who stretches his limbs, which have grown stiff through long standing, dispenses with a handkerchief, and so on. The students press round the easels, examining each other's work. There is a crowd of them around mine; I am a very able student of the academy and hold out great promise of becoming one of "our coryphaei," to use an apt expression of V.S., the well-known art critic, who had long predicted that "Ryabinin will make good." That is why everyone is looking at my work.

Five minutes later all are back in their places, Taras clambers on to his pedestal and puts his hand on his head, and we all daub away again.

And so every day.

Tiresome, is it not? I have long come to realize how very tiresome it is. But I am like a railway engine with

an open steam port, which has but two alternatives: to roll along the rails until the steam is exhausted, or to jump them and reduce the shapely colossus of iron and brass into a shapeless wreckage. I am on the rails; they clasp my wheels, and if I run off them, what then? Come what may, I must roll down to the station even though that station appears to me a black hole in which you cannot make anything out. Others say that this will be artistic activity. That it is something artistic is undeniable, but that it is activity. . . .

When I walk round the exhibition and look at the pictures, what do I see in them? Canvases with paint laid on them in such a way that they produce effects similar to those produced by various objects. People go about marvelling—how cleverly the colours are arranged! And nothing more. Books, stacks of books have been written on the subject; many of them I have read. But the Taines, the Carrières, the Kuglers, and all the others up to Proudhon who have written about art, prove nothing. They all talk about the meaning of art, but when I read them the thought always lurks in the back of my mind—is there a meaning? I have seen no good picture exercise any good influence on anyone, so why should I believe in it?

Why? I must believe, it is absolutely essential that I should, but *how*? How can I be sure that my whole life will not merely serve to gratify the stupid curiosity of the mob (if not something worse—to rouse base instincts, for instance) or the vanity of some parvenu stomach on legs, who will saunter up to my picture—a picture born in the throes of experience, painted not with pigments and brush, but with my very nerves and heart's blood—mutter: "Mm . . . not bad," thrust his hand into his bulging pocket, toss me a few hundred rubles and take it away from me. Take it together with all the emotions and soul stirrings, the sleepless nights, the joys and the pain, the hopes and disappointments that went into its creation. And again

you walk alone amidst the crowd. Mechanically you paint the model in the evening, mechanically you paint him in the morning, exciting the wonder of the professors and your classmates by your rapid progress. What are you doing this for, whither are you going?

Four months have already passed since I sold my last painting, but I have no ideas for a new one. I wish I could think of something. It would give me utter oblivion for a while, I would give myself up to the painting completely, like one sunk in the seclusion of a cloister. The thoughts—whither? why? vanish when you work; there is but a single thought in your head, a single purpose, and the fulfilment of it gives you pleasure. The picture is a world in which you live and to which you are answerable. Conventional standards vanish here—you create new ones for yourself in this new world of yours, and you feel in them your rightfulness, your worth or your worthlessness and falsehood in your own peculiar way, detached from life.

But you cannot paint all the time. In the evening, when dusk interrupts your work, you return to life and hear again that eternal question: "Why?", which keeps you awake, makes you toss about feverishly in your bed, and stare into the darkness as though the answer were written there somewhere. And you fall asleep towards morning to awaken again to another world of dreams peopled only by images that come from within yourself and take shape and substance upon the canvas before you.

"Why aren't you working, Ryabinin?" my neighbour asked me loudly.

I came out of my reveries with a start. My hand holding the palette hung limp; the skirt of my frock coat was smeared with paint; the brushes lay on the floor. I glanced at my sketch; it was finished, and finished well: Taras stood out on the canvas like real.

"I have finished," I answered.

The class was over, too. The model got off his box and

began dressing; all began noisily collecting their things. A hum of conversation arose. The students came over to me and complimented me on my work.

"A medal. The best sketch," some said. Others were silent: artists do not like to praise one another.

III

DEDOV

I believe I command the respect of my classmates. No doubt my more mellow age has something to do with it; the only man in the academy older than I is Volsky. Yes, art possesses an amazing power of attraction! Volsky is a retired officer, a gentleman of about forty-five with a completely grey head; to enter the academy at such an age and start studying all over again—isn't that heroic? But he works hard: in the summer, rain or shine, he paints sketches from morning till evening with a kind of religious fervour; in the winter, when it's light, he is always painting, and in the evening he draws. In two years he has made a great advance, although nature has not endowed him with any special gifts.

Now Ryabinin is another matter: a devilishly gifted nature, but terribly lazy. I don't think he will make good, although all the young artists are his admirers. What I can't make out is his odd predilection for so-called real subjects: he paints peasants' bast shoes, foot-wraps and sheepskin coats as if he had not seen enough of them in real life. The surprising thing is he hardly works at all. Sometimes he will sit down and complete a picture in a month, and everyone shouts about it as if it were a miracle, while at the same time admitting that the technique leaves much to be desired (in my opinion his technique is very poor indeed); and then he stops painting even sketches, goes about looking gloomy, doesn't speak to anyone, not even me, although he does not shun me, I

think, as much as he does his other comrades. A strange young man! These people who cannot find complete satisfaction in art surprise me. They cannot understand that nothing is more ennobling than creative work.

Yesterday I finished my picture and displayed it, and today people have already been asking the price. I will not let it go at less than 300. I have been offered 250. I don't believe in coming down once the price has been fixed. It makes people respect you. All the less reason is there for coming down now when the picture is sure to sell; the subject is a popular one and well-liked: winter, sunset; black trunks in the foreground stand out sharply against a glowing sky. K. paints that way, and what a sale he has! They say he made as much as twenty thousand in a single winter. Not bad! Pretty little sum! I can't understand how some artists manage to live so poorly. Take K. now—not one of his canvases is ever wasted; everything sells. You only have to take a common-sense view of things: while you are painting a picture you are an artist; when it's done, you are a dealer; and the shrewder you handle the business the better. People are always trying to cheat us artists.

IV

RYABININ

I live in the Fifteenth Line, Sredni Prospekt, and four times a day I take a walk along the quayside where foreign steamships put in. I love this place for its colourfulness, its noise and bustle, and for the wealth of material it provides me with. It was here, watching the day-labourers carrying sacks, winding windlasses and winches, and driving trucks with all kinds of loads, that I learned to draw the working man.

I walked home with Dedov, the landscapist. A man as kindly and innocent as the landscape itself and passionate-

ly in love with his art. Here is one who has no doubts whatever; he paints what he sees: if he sees a river, he paints a river, if he sees a tussocky marsh he paints a tussocky marsh. What he wants that river and that marsh for, he never stops to think. He is, I believe, an educated man; at any rate he has graduated as an engineer. He gave up his post in the civil service after coming into some property or other, which enables him to exist without working. Now he paints for all he is worth: in the summer he sits sketching in a field or in the woods from morning till evening, in the winter he never tires of composing sunsets, sunrises, noons, the beginning and ending of rain, winters, springs and so forth. He has forgotten his engineering and does not regret it. But when we pass the wharves he often explains to me the use of the huge iron and steel masses—machine parts, boilers and other odds and ends unloaded from the steamers.

"Look at that thumping boiler they've shipped over," he said to me one evening, giving the boiler a resounding whack with his stick.

"Do you mean to say we can't make them here at home?" I said.

"They make them here, too, but not enough. See what a lot they've brought over. Pretty poor workmanship, too; they'll have to be repaired here; see the joints coming undone? The rivets have come loose here, too. Do you know how it's done? A hellish job, I tell you. A man crawls inside the boiler and grips the rivet with pincers, pressing on it with his chest as hard as he can while a workman outside hammers the rivet until he has beaten a head on it like this."

He pointed to a long row of raised metallic disks running along the boiler seam.

"But, Dedov, that's as good as hammering at his chest!"

"So it is. I tried it once inside the boiler, and crawled out after the fourth rivet more dead than alive. My chest

was all bruised. But these men somehow manage to get used to it. To be sure, they die like flies; after a year or two, if the man survives at all, he is hardly fit for anything. Nor would you be if you had to take terrific blows of a hammer on your chest all day long, and hunched up in a stuffy boiler at that. In winter the iron is freezing cold, and he has to sit or lie on it. That boiler over there, now—the narrow red one, see it?—you can't even sit in that: you have to lie on your side chest up. It's hard work for those Human Anvils."

"Human Anvils?"

"Yes, that's what the workmen call them. They often grow deaf from the din. And you think they receive much for this gruelling toil? A mere pittance! Because you don't need skill or art here, but just flesh. . . . You'd be surprised, Ryabinin, how many painful impressions you get at all these factories! I am so glad to be done with them for good. Life was simply a misery at first, with all that suffering around you. Having nature to deal with is quite a different thing. She does you no harm, and you don't have to cause her any harm in order to exploit her the way we artists do. Just look at that greyish tone!" He suddenly broke off, pointing to a patch of sky. "There, just below that little cloud—isn't it lovely! It has a greenish tinge. If you were to paint it exactly as it is, no one would believe you, I am sure. It's not bad really, is it?"

I expressed my approval, although, to tell the truth, I saw nothing beautiful in that dun patch of St. Petersburg sky, and interrupted Dedov, who was about to go off into raptures over another tone refinement elsewhere.

"Tell me, where can I see one of those Human Anvils?"

"Let us go down to the factory; I'll show you all kinds of things there. We can go tomorrow if you like. You don't intend to paint that Human Anvil, do you? It's not worth it. Can't you find something more cheerful? As for the factory we can go any time—tomorrow if you like."

We went to the factory the same day and took a good look round. We saw the Human Anvil, too. He was crouching inside a boiler, receiving the blows of the hammer on his chest. I watched him for half an hour; during that half-hour the hammer rose and fell a hundred times. The man writhed. I am going to paint him.

V

DEDOV

Ryabinin has taken such a stupid idea into his head that I don't know what to think about it. The other day I took him down to a metalworks; we spent the whole day there, inspecting everything, and I explained the different processes to him (to my surprise I had forgotten very little of what I had known professionally); finally, I took him into the boiler department. They happened to be working there on an enormous boiler. Ryabinin got inside it and for half an hour sat there watching the workman holding the rivets with a pincers. He came out looking pale and upset; he did not say a word all the way back. And today he announced that he had already begun to paint that Human Anvil. What an idea! Looking for the poetic in the mud! Here I can speak my mind freely, and say what I would never have said, of course, in public, namely, that all this muzhik trend in art, in my opinion, is sheer ugliness. Who wants those notorious "Volga Bargemen" of Repin's? They are excellently painted, I admit; but that's about all there is to it. Where is the beauty here, harmony, refinement? Is it not to reproduce the beautiful in nature that art exists?

Look at me now! Another day or two's work and my serene "Morning in May" will be finished. The water barely ripples in the pond, the drooping willows bend their boughs over it, the East bursts into flame, painting the fleecy cloudlets a rosy tint. The figure of a woman

going for water with a bucket descends the steep bank, frightening away a flock of ducks. And that is all; it looks simple, yet I clearly feel that there is a world of poetry in the picture. Now that is art! It attunes a man's soul to a mood of gentle tranquil wistfulness, it softens his heart. But Ryabinin's Human Anvil will affect no one, if only because people will try to get away from it as quickly as they can in order to be rid of that squalid sight of filthy rags and ugly mug. It's a queer thing! Now in music, for instance, no harsh discordant sounds are permitted: then why should we, in painting, be allowed to depict positively ugly and repellent images? I must speak to L. about this; he will write an article and take Ryabinin down a peg or two while he is at it. He deserves it.

VI

RYABININ

It is a fortnight since I stopped going to the academy. I sit at home, painting. The work has worn me out completely, although it is going well. I should have said *because* it is going well instead of *although*. The nearer it moves to completion the more frightening does this thing I have painted seem to me. I also have a feeling that this will be my last painting.

There he sits before me, crouching in the dark boiler, a man clothed in rags, panting with fatigue. He would not be visible at all but for the light that filters through the round holes drilled for the rivets. These disks of light spangle his clothes and face, throw patches of gleaming gold on his tatters, on his matted grimy beard and hair, his livid face, down which pours sweat mixed with dirt, on his knotted toil-worn hands, his broad, sunken, pain-racked chest. The terrible blows descend upon the boiler without a stop and make the unfortunate fellow exert every ounce of his strength to keep his body balanced in

its unnatural pose. I have tried to express this strained effort of the man as best I could.

Sometimes I put aside my palette and brushes and sit down as far away from the picture as I can, directly facing it. I am pleased with it; I have never done anything so well as that ghastly thing. The only trouble is this satisfaction is torture to me instead of a pleasure. It is not a painted picture, it is a ripened disease. Where it is going to end I do not know, but I feel that after this picture I will have nothing more to paint. Fowlers, fishers, huntsmen with all kinds of expressions and typical faces, that whole "rich domain of genre"—of what use is it to me now? I shall never be as effectual as I am with this Human Anvil, if I am effectual at all. . . .

I made an experiment: I invited Dedov down and showed him my picture. All he said was, "Oh, I say," and spread his hands. He sat down, looked at it for half an hour, then silently took his leave and went away. I believe he was impressed. But then he is an artist after all.

I, too, sit in front of my picture, and it impresses me too. You look and cannot tear your eyes away from it; you feel for that pain-racked tortured figure. Sometimes I even seem to hear the blows of the hammer. It will drive me mad. I must cover it up.

The easel with the picture on it is covered with a cloth, but I still sit before it, the same dread unuttered thoughts preying on my mind. The sun goes down and throws a shaft of slanting yellow light upon the covered easel through the dusty window-panes. Exactly like a human figure. Like the Weltgeist in *Faust,* as represented by German actors.

. . . Wer ruft mich?

Who calls thee? I, I myself have created thee here. I have invoked thee, not from the "spheres," but from a

dark and stuffy boiler in order that the sight of thee may appal that clean, that sleek and hateful rabble. Bound to canvas by the spell of my power, come forth, gaze down upon those dress coats and trains, and shout to them: I am a festering sore! Smite their hearts, give them no sleep, rise as a ghost before their eyes! Kill their peace of mind, as thou hast killed mine. . . .

Not likely! The picture has been finished, and put in a gilt frame, and two attendants will bear it off to the exhibition at the academy on their heads. And now there it stands among the Noons and Sunsets, next to a "Girl with a cat," not far from a seven-yard-long "Ivan Grozny piercing the foot of Vaska Shibanov with his staff." You cannot say that no one looked at it; people will look at it and even praise it. Artists will discuss the texture. Reviewers, taking their cue from them, will start scribbling in their notebooks. Mr. V.S. alone takes his cue from no one; he looks, approves, praises, and shakes my hand. L. the art critic will furiously attack the poor Human Anvil, and shout: "But where does beauty come in? Tell me, where is the beautiful?" And he will rail at me in good set terms. The public. . . . The public pass by impassively or with a grimace of distaste; the ladies will merely say: "Ah, comme il est laid, ce Human Anvil," and sail along to the next picture, the "Girl with a cat," looking at which they will say: "Pretty, very pretty," or something like that. Solid-looking ox-eyed gentlemen will stare at it, lower their gaze to the catalogue, emit a sound that is half moo and half sniff, and proceed on their way. Only some youth, perhaps, or some young girl will stop attentively, and read with amazement in the anguish-filled eyes looking down at them from the canvas the cry of pain that I have put into them.

And what next? The picture has been shown, bought, and taken away. But what is going to happen to me? Will all that I have lived through these last few days be lost

without a trace? Will the end of it be a mere stirring of emotion, after which will come relaxation and a quest of innocent subjects? Innocent subjects! I was suddenly reminded of a picture-gallery keeper of my acquaintance, who compiled a catalogue, and shouted to the clerk:

"Martynov, take it down! No. 112. First love scene: girl plucks a rose."

"Martynov, another one! No. 113. Second love scene: girl smells the rose."

Shall I be smelling the rose as before? Or will I go off the rails?

VII

DEDOV

Ryabinin has almost finished his Human Anvil and invited me today to have a look at it. I went there with a prejudiced mind, but I must say that what I saw made me change my opinion. Most impressive. The design is excellent. Plasticity of surface. Best of all is the lighting, at once eerie and perfectly true. The picture would undoubtedly have its merits were it not for that queer preposterous subject. L. quite agrees with me, and his article will appear in the newspaper next week. We'll see what Ryabinin will have to say then. L., of course, will have difficulty in criticizing the picture as far as technique is concerned, but then he will be able to deal with its significance as a work of *art*, which does not bear being degraded to the service of base and vague ideas.

L. visited me today. He was full of praise. Made certain remarks on various minor points, but on the whole was very complimentary. If only the professors looked at my picture with his eyes! I wonder whether I will receive at long last what every student of the academy strives after —a gold medal? A medal, four years of life abroad with all

expenses paid, and in prospect—a professorship. Yes, I did the right thing to drop that dreary humdrum work, that drudgery, where at every step you run into one or another of Ryabinin's human anvils.

VIII

RYABININ

The picture has been sold and taken to Moscow. I received the money for it, and on the demand of my friends was obliged to entertain them at the Vienna. I don't know when that custom first arose, but practically all the celebrations among the young artists are held in the private corner room of that hotel. It is a large high room with a chandelier, and bronze candelabras, with carpets and furniture darkened by age and tobacco smoke, and a grand piano, which had done some hard work in its day under the blithe fingers of impromptu pianists; the huge looking-glass alone is new, because it is changed two or three times a year, whenever roistering merchants instead of artists are in possession of the corner room.

Quite a crowd had gathered: genrists, landscapists and sculptors, two reviewers from some small newspapers, and several strangers. They began drinking and talking. Within half an hour all were talking together, as everyone was a bit tight. I was too. I remember being tossed for a jolly good fellow and making a speech. Then I kissed one of the reviewers and drank fraternity with him. We drank, talked and kissed a good deal, and broke up at four in the morning. Two of our company, if I am not mistaken, spent the night right there in the corner room of the hotel Vienna.

I barely managed to get home, and flung myself down on my bed without undressing. I felt as if I were in a storm-tossed ship, and the room seemed to be pitching

and rolling together with the bed. This lasted for a minute or two, and then I fell asleep.

I fell asleep, and woke up very late. My head aches; my body is weighted with lead. For a long time I cannot open my eyes, and when I do, I see the easel—the empty easel without the picture. It reminds me of past experiences, and the thing starts all over again. . . . My God, I must do something to end this!

My head aches worse and worse, and a mist enfolds me. I fall asleep, wake up, and fall asleep again. And I know not whether it is deathly silence that reigns around me or deafening noise, a hideous chaos of sound that is terrible to the ear. It may be silence, but there is something in it that clangs and knocks, spins and flies. It is like an enormous thousand-horsepower pump, pumping water from a bottomless abyss, pumping with a noise in which one can distinguish the dull thud of falling water and the pounding of the engine. And rising above it all a single note, an endless, drawn-out, agonizing note. I want to open my eyes, to get up, go over to the window, open it and hear living sounds, a human voice, the rattle of cab wheels, the barking of a dog—anything but that perpetual din. But I have no strength. I was drunk yesterday. And I must lie here and listen to it, listen without end.

I wake up and fall asleep again. The clangour and clatter sound harsher, closer, more distinct. The pounding draws near, keeping time with my pulse. Is it within me, in my head, or outside of me? Harsh, clear, distinct . . . one-two, one-two. . . . A hammering upon metal or something else. I clearly hear the sound of blows upon iron; the iron booms and quivers. The hammer at first strikes with a muffled sound, as though falling into a viscid mass, and then grows more vibrant, until at last the huge boiler is ringing like a bell. Then a pause, then quietly again; louder and louder, and again that unbearable ear-splitting clang. Yes, that's what it is: at first they strike

the soft red-hot iron, and afterwards it hardens. The boiler, too, makes that booming noise when the head of the rivet has hardened. I understand now. But those other sounds—what are they? I try to make them out, but a mist clouds my brain. It seems so easy to remember, it haunts my mind, so maddeningly near—but what it is I know not. I cannot grasp it. But let it be. I know what it is, only I cannot recollect it.

But the noise swells and diminishes, now growing to a hideous volume, now almost dying away altogether. And it seems to me as if it is not the noise that is dying away, but myself disappearing somewhere, and I cannot hear anything, I cannot stir a finger, open an eyelid, or cry out. Sheer terror grips me, and I awake in a cold sweat. Rather, I awake to another dream. I dream that I am at a factory again, but not the one I went to with Dedov. This one is larger and gloomier. On all sides stand gigantic furnaces of the queerest shapes. Flames shoot out of them, covering the already coal-black roof and walls of the building with soot. The machines joggle and screech, and I am barely able to pass between the revolving wheels and running quivering belts; not a soul anywhere. From somewhere comes a clang and clatter: that is where the work is going on. Wild shrieks, terrific blows can be heard there; I dread going in there, but I am borne along despite myself, and the blows sound ever louder, the screams more terrifying. Then everything merges into a roar, and I see. . . . I see a queer hideous creature on the ground squirming under the blows that rain down on him from all sides. A whole mob is beating him with whatever comes handy. Here are all my acquaintances with frenzied faces, striking this creature, for whom I have been able to find no name, with hammers, crowbars, sticks, and fists. I know that it is he, the same one. . . . I rush forward, want to shout out: "Stop! What are you doing?" and suddenly see a white, distorted, terrible face—terrible

because that face is my own. I see myself, my other self, raising a hammer to deal a smashing blow.

Then the hammer descended upon my skull. Everything disappeared; for a time I was still aware of the darkness, the silence, the emptiness and my own immobility, but presently I disappeared myself. . . .

Ryabinin lay unconscious till the evening, when the landlady, a Finn, reminding herself that her lodger had not left his room all day, went in to him and found the poor youth tossing about and raving in a high fever. Frightened, she uttered an exclamation in an unintelligible native dialect, and sent her little girl for a doctor. The doctor came, looked at the patient, examined him, grunted, sat down at the table, wrote out a prescription and rode away, while Ryabinin continued to rave and toss about in his bed.

IX

DEDOV

Ryabinin, poor devil, fell ill after yesterday's carouse. I went to see him and found him lying insensible. His landlady is nursing him. I had to give her some money as there wasn't a kopek on Ryabinin's table; I don't know whether the confounded woman had stolen it, or whether he had spent it all at the Vienna. True, we had made a real night of it and had had a jolly good time; Ryabinin and I drank fraternity. I also drank with L. A fine chap, L., and how he understands art! I have never known anyone to show such a subtle understanding of what I wanted to say in my picture as he has done in his last article, and I am very grateful to him for it. I ought to paint a small thing, something à la Klever, and make him a present of it. By the way, his name is Alexander; isn't it his Saint's Day tomorrow?

I'm afraid it will go hard with poor Ryabinin, though; that big picture he's painting for the examination is far from finished, and he may be late with it. If he is ill for a month he will not get the medal. It will mean good-bye then to his foreign journey. One thing I am glad of—that, as a landscapist, I am not competing with him; but his comrades must be rubbing their hands. I don't blame them—it means one chance more.

But Ryabinin must not be left to the mercy of fate; I shall have to take him to the hospital.

X

RYABININ

After lying unconscious for many days I came to myself today and could not make out where I was. It was some time before I realized that the long white package lying before my eyes was my own body, tucked up in a blanket. With a great effort I turned my head to right and left—which caused a buzzing in my ears—and saw a long dimly lit ward with two rows of beds on which lay the wrapped up figures of patients, a knight in armour standing between large windows with white lowered blinds who proved to be simply a huge brass washstand, an icon of the Saviour in a corner with a glimmering little oil lamp before it, and two colossal tiled stoves. I heard the low laboured breathing of my neighbour, the gurgling sighs of a sick man lying a little way off, and the loud snores of an attendant, apparently hired to watch at the bedside of a dangerously sick man, who may have been alive, or may have been already dead and was lying here with us, the living.

Us, the living.... "Alive," I thought, and even whispered the word. And suddenly a curious feeling of joy and elation, such as I had not experienced since a child, swept over me together with the realization that I was out of

death's reach, that I had a whole lifetime before me, a life which I would no doubt be able to shape after my own pattern (oh, you may be certain of that), and I turned over on my side, albeit with difficulty, drew my knees up, put my hand under my head and fell asleep, just as I used to do in childhood, when, waking up in the middle of the night beside your sleeping mother, you hear the window-panes rattling in the wind, and storm wailing plaintively in the chimney, and the logs of the house cracking like pistol shots from the severe frost outside, and you begin to cry softly, at once afraid and anxious to wake your mother, and she awakes, kisses you sleepily and makes the sign of the cross over you, and your fears allayed, you roll yourself up into a ball and fall asleep again, your little heart happily warm.

My God, how weak I am! Today I tried to get up and cross over from my bed to that of my neighbour opposite, a student, who was convalescing from the fever, and I nearly dropped midway. But my head is recovering faster than my body. When I came to myself I hardly remembered anything, and I had to make an effort to recollect even the names of my intimate acquaintances. Now it has all come back, but not as a reality of the past, but as a dream. It does not torment me any more, no. The past has gone beyond recall.

Dedov today brought me a heap of newspapers in which praise is lavished on my "Human Anvil" and his "Morning." L. alone did not praise me. But who cares now. It is all so far far away. I am very glad for Dedov's sake; he has received the grand gold medal and will soon be going abroad. He is delighted; his face shines like a buttered pancake. He asked whether I intended competing next year, seeing that my illness had prevented

me from doing so now. The way he stared when I told him "no"!

"You don't mean it seriously?"

"Quite seriously," I answered.

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know yet."

He went away a puzzled man.

XI

DEDOV

This last fortnight I had been living in a dazed state of excitement and impatience, and only now, when I am sitting in the coach of the Warsaw Railway, have I calmed down. I can scarcely believe it: I am now a pensioner of the academy, an artist going abroad for four years to perfect himself in art. *Vivat Academia!*

But Ryabinin, Ryabinin! I saw him in the street today as I was getting into the carriage that was to take me to the station. "I congratulate you," he said, "you may congratulate me too."

"On what?"

"I have just passed my examination at the teachers' seminary."

The teachers' seminary! An artist, a talent! Why, he will ruin himself, the village will be the end of him! The man must be mad!

Dedov was right for once; Ryabinin was indeed a failure. But of that another time.

1879

ATTALEA PRINCEPS

In a certain big city there was a botanical garden with a vast greenhouse in it made of iron and glass. It was a very handsome building, supported by slender twisted columns, upon which rested light decorative arches webbed with iron window frames. The greenhouse looked its best in the evening in the red glare of the

sunset. It was all aglow then, shot with shifting gleams, like a huge sparkling gem with small-cut facets.

Through the thick transparent glass one could see the imprisoned plants. Vast though the greenhouse was, they were cramped in it. The tangled roots fought one another for moisture and nutrition. The branches of the trees were entwined with the huge leaves of the palms, which they bent and broke, themselves pressing up against the iron frames and bending and breaking in turn. The gardeners were constantly lopping the branches and tying the leaves up with wire to curb their wild growth, but it did not help much. What the plants needed was the wide free spaces of their native habitats. They were natives of hot climes, tender, luxurious creations, who remembered their native countries and yearned for them. However transparent the glass roof might be, it was not the bright sky. Sometimes, in the winter, the panes froze over, and then it would grow quite dark in the greenhouse. The wind would howl and beat against the frames, and rattle them. Snow-drifts covered the roof. Listening to the howling of the wind, the plants would remember another wind, a warm humid wind that gave to them life and health. And they longed to feel its breath upon them again, to have it sway their branches and wanton with their leaves. But the air in the greenhouse was without a stir, except perhaps sometimes in the winter when the storm would smash a pane of glass and a cold sharp flurry, laden with hoarfrost, would find its way under the dome. In the wake of that flurry the leaves turned white, shrank, and wilted.

But new panes were put in very quickly. The botanical garden was in charge of an excellent scientific director, who kept things in perfect order, although he spent most of his time with a microscope in a special glass cabin set up in the main building.

Among the plants was a palm-tree, taller and more beautiful than any of the others. The director who sat in

his cabin called it by the Latin name Attalea. But that was not its real name: the botanists had made it up. The botanists did not know its native name, and it was not written in lampblack on the white little board that was nailed to the trunk of the palm-tree. One day a traveller from the warm land which the palm-tree had grown up in visited the botanical garden, and when he saw the tree he smiled, because it reminded him of home.

"Ah," he said, "I know that tree." And he called it by its native name.

"Excuse me," the director shouted from his cabin, where he had been carefully slitting open some stalks with a razor, "you are mistaken. The tree you have just mentioned does not exist. This is Attalea princeps, a native of Brazil."

"Oh yes," the Brazilian answered, "I quite believe you that botanists call it Attalea, but it has a real name of its own."

"Its real name is the one that science has given it," the botanist said dryly, and shut the door of his cabin to keep people from interfering with his work, people who did not even understand that when a man of science had something to say the best you could do was to keep silent and listen to him.

But the Brazilian stood looking at the tree, and the longer he looked the sadder he grew. He thought of his country, of her sun and her skies, her luxuriant forests with their wonderful birds and beasts, her deserts, her lovely southern nights. And he thought that nowhere had he been so happy as in his native land, although he had travelled all over the world. He touched the tree with his hand, as if bidding it farewell, and left the garden. The next day found him sailing home in a steamer.

But the palm remained. She felt worse than ever now, although she had felt bad enough before. She was so lonely. She towered thirty feet above the tops of all the

other plants, and those other plants disliked her, envied her, thought her proud. Her stature caused her nothing but misery; besides being all alone while they were together, she better remembered her native sky and missed it more, because she was nearer than any of the others to that horrid glass roof that took its place. Sometimes she caught a glimpse of blue through it, a glimpse of sky, alien and wan, but none the less real blue sky. And when the plants chattered among themselves, Attalea was always silent, thinking longingly how good it would be to stand under that sky, pallid and sickly though it was.

"I beg your pardon," said the Sago Palm, who was very fond of moisture, "do you know whether we are going to be watered soon or not? I am afraid I shall be parched today, really."

"You surprise me, dear neighbour," said a pot-bellied Cactus. "Do you mean to say that all that enormous amount of water which they pour out on you every day is not enough for you? Look at me: I am given very little moisture, yet I am always fresh and juicy."

"It is not our habit to scrimp," answered the Sago. "We are not a cactus to grow on such dry meagre soil. We are not accustomed to live just anyhow. And besides, let me tell you your remarks are uncalled for."

And the Sago, in a huff, fell silent.

"As far as I am concerned," interposed the Cinnamon, "I am quite satisfied with my position. To be sure, it is rather dull here, but at least I can live without fear of being barked."

"But not all of us were barked," said the Tree-Fern. "Of course, some may think even this prison a paradise after the miserable existence they led outside."

At this the Cinnamon, forgetting that it had been barked, waxed indignant and started an argument. Some plants took its side, others the Tree-Fern's, and some hard

words were exchanged. If they had been able to move there would assuredly have been a fight.

"What are you quarrelling for?" said Attalea. "It won't help you, will it? You are only making yourselves more miserable with all this rancour and bitterness. Instead of quarrelling you would do better to use your wits. Listen to me: grow higher and wider, throw out your branches, press up against the frames and glass, and our greenhouse will come toppling down and we shall all be free. If only one branch presses against the glass, they will cut it off, of course, but what can they do against a hundred strong brave trunks? The thing is to go about it all together, and victory will be ours."

At first Attalea's speech met with no objections: everyone was silent, not knowing what to say. At last the Sago made up her mind.

"That is sheer nonsense," she declared.

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" all the other trees chimed in, and tried to prove to Attalea that what she proposed was simply absurd. "Vain dreams!" they shouted. "Absurd! Ridiculous! The frames are strong, we shall never break them, and even if we do, then what? Men will come along with knives and axes, they will chop off the branches, and mend the frames, and everything will be as before. We shall only have big pieces of ourselves chopped off for our pains."

"Well, just as you please!" answered Attalea. "I know what I have to do now. I shall leave you in peace: live as you will, grumble at one another, quarrel over the water doled out to you, and remain for ever in your glass prison. I will find a way myself. I want to see the sky and the sun not through these bars and panes—and I will!"

And the Palm looked down proudly with her green crown upon the forest of her mates spread beneath her. None of them had the courage to say anything to her face, and the Sago alone whispered to her neighbour the Cycas:

"Very well, we shall see how they will chop that big head of yours off. That will bring you down from your high perch!"

The others, though silent, none the less resented Attalea's proud words. The only one who did not take offence at the Palm's speech was a tiny grass plant. It was the meanest and most despised of all the plants in the greenhouse—a pale, sickly, crawling thing with limp stubby little leaves. It was in no way remarkable, and its only use in the greenhouse was for covering up the bare earth. It twined itself round the base of the big Palm, and listened to her, and it thought that Attalea was right. Although a stranger to southern climes, it also loved the air and freedom. The greenhouse was a prison to it too. "If I, a weak insignificant little herb, suffer so much without my grey patch of sky, my pallid sun and cold rain, then what must this beautiful and mighty tree suffer in captivity!" it thought, as it snuggled up to the Palm caressingly.

"Why am I not a big tree? I would do as you say. We would grow together, and together we would leave this prison. Then the rest would see that Attalea had been right."

But it was not a big tree, it was only a weak little herb. It could only nestle closer to Attalea's trunk, whisper its love to her, and wish her good luck in her venture.

"Of course, it isn't so warm here, the sky is not so bright, the rains are not so plentiful as in your country, but we do have a sky, and a sun, and winds. We have no plants as luxuriant as you and your companions, plants with such immense leaves and gorgeous flowers, but we have very nice trees growing in our country too: pines, and firs, and birches. I am but a tiny herb and will never reach freedom, but you—you are so great and strong. Your trunk is hard, and you have not far to grow to reach the glass roof. You will break through it into God's bright world. And then you will tell me whether

it is as lovely as it used to be. I shall be content with that."

"Why, little grass, don't you want to go out with me together? My trunk is hard and strong; lean upon it, creep up me. I can carry you out quite easily."

"Ah, I wish I could! But look what a poor limp thing I am: I cannot even lift a single limb of mine. No, I am no companion for you. Grow and good luck to you. Only one thing I ask you: when you get out, remember your poor little friend sometimes!"

Then the Palm started to grow. Visitors to the greenhouse had always been surprised at its tremendous height, but now it grew taller and taller every month. The director of the botanical garden attributed this rapid growth to the excellent care that was taken of it, and he was proud of the skill and knowledge with which he had organized the greenhouse and was conducting his business.

"Yes, my dear, just look at Attalea princeps," he would say. "Such tall specimens are rarely met with even in Brazil. We do everything to the best of our ability to make these plants grow indoors as freely as they would outside, and I believe that we have achieved some success in this direction."

And with a complacent air, he would give the hard tree a few whacks with his stick. The blows would resound through the greenhouse, the leaves of the Palm would quiver under them. Ah, if that tree could voice its feelings, what a cry of wrath that director would have heard!

"He imagines that I am growing for his pleasure," thought Attalea. "Let him think it!"

And she went on growing upward, using all her juices for the purpose, and depriving her roots and leaves of them. Sometimes it seemed to her as if the distance between herself and the roof was not diminishing, and then she would exert all her strength. The frames came nearer

and nearer, and at last a young leaf touched the cold glass and the ironwork.

"Look," said the plants, "look how high she has climbed! Will she dare to do it?"

"She has grown tremendously," said the Tree-Fern.

"Pooh, that's nothing! Now if she could grow the way I do, I could understand," said the fat Cycas, who had a trunk like a barrel. "What's the sense in stretching upward like that! All the same, she will not be able to do anything. The bars are too strong, the glass too thick."

Another month went by. Attalea was still growing. At last she was pressing up against the frames. There was no more room for her to grow. Then her trunk began to bend. The leafy top got crushed, the cold bars of the frame bit into the tender young leaves, cut through them and mutilated them, but the tree was stubborn, it pressed against the bars in spite of everything, and the bars began to give way, although they were made of strong iron.

The little grass watched the struggle breathlessly.

"But does it not hurt you? If the frames are so strong had you not better give it up?" it said to the Palm.

"Hurt me? What is pain when I *want* to be free. Did you not encourage me yourself?" answered the Palm.

"I did, but I did not know it would be so hard. I feel sorry for you. You are suffering so."

"Silence, weak plant! Do not pity me! I shall die or be free!"

At that very moment there came a loud snap. A thick iron bar had broken. The shattered glass rained down in splinters. One of them struck the director's hat as he was coming into the greenhouse.

"What is this?" he exclaimed, starting back at the sight of the falling splinters. He ran out and looked up at the roof. The green crown of the Palm had straightened itself out and was towering proudly above the glass dome.

"Is this all?" she thought. "Is this all I languished and suffered for so much? And to attain this had been my fondest dream?"

It was late autumn when Attalea straightened out her crushed crown through the hole. It was drizzling, and the wind was driving a wrack of clouds before it. It seemed to her as if they were wrapping themselves round her. The trees were already bare, and looked ghostlike and macabre. The pines and firs alone wore their dark green foliage. The trees stared gloomily at the Palm. "You will freeze to death!" they seemed to be saying to her. "You do not know what cold is. You are not used to it. What made you come out of your warm house?"

And it dawned on Attalea that this was the end. She began to freeze. Seek the shelter of the roof again? She could not do that now. She would have to stand there in the cold wind, exposed to its blasts and the sharp touch of the snow-flakes, looking at the bleak sky, at starveling nature, at the dirty backyard of the botanical garden, at the huge dreary city looming through the mist, and waiting for the men down in the greenhouse to decide what to do with her.

The director ordered the tree to be cut down. "We could build a special cap over her," he said, "but for how long? She will grow again and smash everything. Besides, it will cost too much. Cut her down."

The Palm was fastened down with steel ropes, so that in falling she would not smash the walls of the greenhouse, then low down, near the very roots, she was sawn through. The little grass herb that entwined her trunk refused to part with its friend, and was sawn through too. After the Palm had been dragged out of the greenhouse, the sawn stump had crushed and lacerated little stalks and leaves clinging to it.

"Tear up that rubbish and throw it away," said the director. "It has gone yellow, and besides, the saw has damaged it badly. We shall plant something else here."

One of the gardeners, with a dexterous stroke of the spade, ripped away a heap of the grass. He flung it into a basket, carried it out and threw it away in the backyard, right on the dead palm-tree, which lay in the dirt, already half-buried in the snow.

1879

THE REMINISCENCES OF PRIVATE IVANOV

I

I arrived in Kishinev on the fourth of May eighteen hundred and seventy-seven, and within half an hour learned that the 56th Infantry Division was passing through the town. As I had come with the intention of

joining some regiment and going to the war, the seventh of May already found me standing in the street at four o'clock in the morning among the grey ranks lined up outside the billet of the colonel of the 222nd Starobelsky Infantry Regiment. I had on a greatcoat with red shoulder-straps and blue tabs, and a cap with a blue band; across my back was a pack, at my belt a cartridge pouch, in my hand a heavy rifle.

The band struck up, and the colours were carried out of the colonel's lodgings. A command rang out; the regiment noiselessly presented arms. Then a terrific uproar arose: the colonel shouted a command, and this was taken up by the battalion and company commanders and the platoon NCO's. The result was a confused and to me quite unintelligible movement of greatcoats, which ended in the regiment stretching out in a long column and swinging off to the sounds of the regimental band, which blared out a gay march. I marched along, too, trying to keep in step with my neighbour. The pack pulled backwards, the heavy pouches forwards, the rifle kept slipping off my shoulder, and the collar of the greatcoat chafed my neck; but despite all these little discomforts, the music, the orderly heavy movement of the column, the fresh early morning air, and the sight of the bristling bayonets and grim sun-tanned faces attuned one's soul to a calm and steadfast mood.

Despite the early hour people stood about in crowds outside the houses, and half-dressed figures looked out of the windows. We marched down a long straight street, past the market-place, where the Moldavians on their ox-waggons were already beginning to arrive; the street climbed uphill and ran into the town cemetery. The morning was cold, bleak, and drizzly; the trees in the cemetery loomed through a mist; the tops of the gravestones could be seen peeping from behind the gates and the wall. We skirted the cemetery, which we left on our right. It seemed

to me to be looking at us perplexedly through the mist. "Why must you thousands go thousands of miles to die in foreign fields when you can die here, die peacefully and repose your bodies under my wooden crosses and stone slabs? Stay!"

But we did not stay. Some unknown secret force drew us on, a force than which there is no stronger in human life. Each one separately would have gone home, but the entire mass went forward, actuated not by a sense of discipline, not by the realization of a just cause, not by a feeling of hatred towards an unknown enemy, not by fear of punishment, but by that mysterious and unconscious force which, for a long time to come yet, will lead humanity on to bloody slaughter—the cardinal cause of all human ills and suffering.

Beyond the cemetery there lay a broad deep valley, which lost itself in the mist. It was raining harder; here and there, far far away, the clouds parted and gave passage to the sunbeams; the slanting sheets of rain then took on a silvery sparkle. The mists crept up the green slopes of the valley; through them one could discern the long strung-out column of troops marching ahead of us. Now and again the bayonets gleamed; the gun, coming into the sunshine, glowed briefly like a bright star, then faded. Sometimes the clouds closed in and it grew darker; the rain came down faster. An hour after we had marched out I felt a trickle of water running down my back.

The first day's march was not a long one: from Kishinev to the village of Gaureni was only eighteen versts. But unaccustomed as I was to carrying a load of twenty to twenty-five pounds, I could hardly sit down at first when we reached the cottage we had been billeted to; I leaned against the wall with my pack and stood like that for about ten minutes in full kit with the rifle in my hand. One of the soldiers who went to the kitchen for his dinner had pity on me and took my mess-tin, but when he came back he

found me fast asleep. I woke up at four in the morning, roused by the jarring bugle sounding the assembly, and within five minutes I was marching again along a muddy clayey road under a drizzly rain that seemed to be pouring out of a fine sieve. In front of me moved a grey back with a brown leather pack slung across it, a rattling mess-tin and a rifle on the shoulder; on either side and behind me moved similar grey figures. The first few days I could not distinguish one from the other. The 222nd Infantry Regiment to which I had been assigned consisted for the most part of Vyatka and Kostroma peasants. All broad-faced, strong in the cheeks, livid brown from the cold; grey smallish eyes, hair and beards of a light colourless hue. Although I remembered some of their names I did not know whom they belonged to. A fortnight later I could not understand how I could possibly have confused two of my neighbours: the one who marched at my side, and the other who marched at the side of the owner of the grey back which I constantly had in front of my eyes. I called them indiscriminately Fyodorov and Zhitkov, and constantly made a mistake, although they did not in the least resemble one another.

Fyodorov, a corporal, was a slim, well-built young man of about twenty-two, of medium height with regular chiselled features, beautifully modelled nose, lips and chin covered with a fair curly little beard, and with merry blue eyes. When the officers shouted "singers to the fore!" he led our company in the chorus, singing in a powerful tenor, which rose to the highest of falsettos on the words:

The Tsar to the Senate is called!

He was a native of the Vladimir gubernia, and had been brought to St. Petersburg as a child. As rarely happens, his city "acquirements" had not spoiled him, but merely given him a polish, teaching him, among other things, to read the newspapers and use all kinds of clever words.

"Of course, Mr. Ivanov," he said to me, "I can have a better judgement of things than Uncle Zhitkov, because St. Petersburg has had its influence on me. In St. Petersburg you have civilization, but in their village it's just ignorance and barbarism. But seeing that he is an elderly person who, you might say, has been through the mill and experienced many of the vicissitudes of fortune, I cannot very well shout at him. He is forty, and I am twenty-three, even though I am the company's corporal."

Uncle Zhitkov was a thickset gloomy-looking muzhik of extraordinary physical strength. He had a dark face with high cheekbones and small scowling eyes. He never smiled and seldom spoke. He was a carpenter by trade, and had been on unlimited leave when our army was mobilized. He had had only a few more months to go to receive his honourable discharge, but the war broke out, and Zhitkov went to fight, leaving at home a wife and five small children. Despite his forbidding aspect and perpetual air of gloom, there was something likeable about him, something kind and strong. It astonishes me now how I could have confused those two men, but during the first few days they both looked alike to me: both grey, loaded up, tired, and chilled to the marrow.

It rained steadily throughout the first half of May, and we marched without tents. The endless clayey road climbed uphill and dipped into a gully almost at every mile. The going was very heavy. Clods of earth stuck to our feet, the grey sky hung low, and the drizzling rain poured down upon us. There was no end to it, no hope of being able to dry and warm ourselves when we bivouacked for the night: the Rumanians did not let us into their houses, and in any case they could not accommodate such a mass of men. We passed through the town or village and halted somewhere on a common.

"Halt! Pile arms!"

And after some hot soup, we lay down right in the mud.

What with the water above us and the water under us, our very bodies seemed to be soaked in it. Shivering, you wrap yourself up in your greatcoat, gradually feeling the damp warmth creeping through your body, and you fall fast asleep until the accursed assembly call. Then once more the grey column, the grey sky, the muddy road and the dismal wet hills and valleys. The men had a hard time of it.

"This rain will never stop," our half-platoon NCO Karpov, an old soldier who had been through the Khiva campaign, said with a sigh. "We are drenched to the skin as it is."

"We'll dry up. The sun will come out and dry us all. We've got a long march ahead of us: we'll dry and get wet again many a time before we get there," one man said, then turning to me, added: "Is the Danube a long way off, Mr. Ivanov?"

"About three more weeks of it."

"Three weeks! With two weeks we've been going. . . ."

"Going to the devil," Zhitkov growled.

"What are you grumbling there, you old devil? None of your scaremongering, now! What do you mean, going to the devil? Why do you say such things?"

"We're not going on a picnic, are we?" Zhitkov snapped back.

"No one says it's a picnic, but we've got to keep the oath we took! Didn't you swear 'To spare nor life nor limb'? Eh? You old fool!" said Karpov.

"What did I say? Am I not going! If we have to die, we'll die, that's all."

"You'd better! Don't let me have any more of your lip!"

Zhitkov said nothing; his face looked gloomier than ever. Besides, no one felt like talking: the going was so difficult. It was slippery and men often fell in the sticky mud. Some hard swearing could be heard in the battalion.

Fyodorov was the only one who kept his spirits up, and he told me story after story about St. Petersburg and the village without ever seeming to tire.

But there is an end to everything. Waking up one morning at our bivouac outside a village where a day's rest had been called, I saw the blue sky and the white clay huts and vineyards flooded with brilliant early morning sunshine, and heard cheerful lively voices. Everyone had got up, dried and rested, after a week and a half's heavy marching under the rain without tents. During our halt the tents arrived too. The soldiers began to pitch them at once, and when this was done, with the pegs driven in and the canvas drawn, almost everyone lay down in their shade.

"If they didn't help in the rain, they'll protect us from the sun."

"Yes, we can't have the gentleman spoiling his complexion," Fyodorov said jestingly, winking in my direction.

II

There were only two officers in our company: Captain Zaikin, the company commander, and subaltern Stebelkov. Our company commander was a plump, good-natured, middle-aged man, Stebelkov a youth, fresh from the military training school. They got on well together; the captain took the subaltern under his wing, and shared his food with him, and, during the rainy weather, even his only raincoat. When the tents were distributed, our officers shared the same tent, and since the officers' tents were roomy, the captain decided to take me in too.

Tired out after a sleepless night (our company had been told off for transport duty the day before and had spent the whole night hauling the baggage train out of the ruts and even dragging it out of an overflowing little river by aid of the "Dubinushka"—a Russian work-song), I had

fallen fast asleep after dinner. I was awakened by the company commander's servant who gently touched my shoulder.

"Mr. Ivanov! Mr. Ivanov!" he whispered, as though loath to wake me, but, on the contrary, trying his best not to disturb my sleep.

"What do you want?"

"The company commander sent me for you," he said, and seeing that I was putting on my belt with the bayonet, added: "He said I was to fetch you just as you were."

There was quite a gathering in Zaikin's tent. In addition to the hosts, there were two more officers: the regimental adjutant and the commander of the rifle company Wenzel. In 1877 a battalion consisted not of four companies, as now, but of five; on the march the rifle company brought up the rear, so that their front ranks trod on the heels of our rear ones. I had often been close to the riflemen and heard from them the worst reports about Junior Captain Wenzel. All four sat drinking tea around a packing case that served as a table and had a samovar, tea things and a bottle on it.

"Oh, Mr. Ivanov! Come in, come in!" the captain shouted. "Nikita! A cup, a mug, a glass—whatever you have there! Move over, Wenzel; let him sit down."

Wenzel got up and bowed very politely. He was a short lean young man with a pale nervous face.

"What restless eyes he has and what thin lips!" I thought at the time.

The adjutant proffered his hand without getting up.

"Lukin," he introduced himself briefly.

I felt awkward. The officers were silent; Wenzel sipped his tea with rum; the adjutant puffed at a short pipe; subaltern Stebelkov nodded to me and went on reading a dog-eared translation of some foreign novel, which made the journey in his suitcase from Russia to the Danube and subsequently back to Russia more dog-eared than ever.

The host poured out a large earthenware mug of tea and added a huge dose of rum.

"Here you are, Mr. Student! Don't mind me; I'm a simple man. As a matter of fact we're all simple men here. Being an educated man yourself, you must excuse us. Isn't that so?"

Saying which he clasped my hand with a downward sweep of his own huge one, like a bird pouncing on its prey, and pumped it several times, while he gazed at me affectionately with his round, bulging little eyes.

"You are a student?" said Wenzel.

"A former student, sir."

He smiled and looked up at me with that restless gaze of his. I recalled what the soldiers had said about him, but at that moment I doubted the truth of it.

"There is no need for the 'sir.' Here in this tent you are one of us. Here you are just an intellectual among similar intellectuals," he said quietly.

"Intellectual is right!" shouted Zaikin. "A student! I love students, although they are rebels. I would have been a student myself but for a twist of fate."

"What twist of fate was that, Zaikin?" the adjutant asked.

"I just couldn't cram up. As regards mathematics I'd pass muster at a pinch, but as for the rest, it just wouldn't work. Literature, you know. . . . Spelling. . . . I didn't even learn to write properly in the military school. Upon my word!"

"That's a fact, Mr. Student," the adjutant said between two huge puffs of smoke. "The captain manages to make six spelling mistakes in a word of five letters." He burst out laughing.

"Now, now, auntie, don't tell any lies!" Zaikin protested. "Calls himself an adjutant, too—why, he can't spell his own name, the dunce!"

The adjutant laughed still louder; subaltern Stebelkov,

who had been sipping his tea, spluttered over his novel and blew out one of the two candles that lit up the tent; I could not help laughing, too. Captain Zaikin enjoyed his own joke tremendously, as his boisterous booming laugh indicated. Wenzel alone did not laugh.

"So it was literature, Captain?" he said in the same quiet voice.

"Yes, literature. And all the rest of it, of course. You know, like that chap who got through his geography as far as Equator, and his history as far as Era. But that's nonsense, of course. That's not the point. I just had money to burn and went the pace. I was a rip, you know, ever since I was a boy. The tricks I was up to! You know how the song goes: 'The lad had his fling while the money lasted, and when that was gone his life was blasted.' I joined this army regiment as a cadet; they sent me to a military school, which I just managed to finish by the skin of my teeth, and now I've been pegging away at it here for over ten years. Now we're going for the Turks. Let's drink it neat, gentlemen. Why spoil it with tea? Gentlemen 'cannon-fodder,' I give you the toast."

"*Chair à canon.*" Wenzel murmured.

"Have it your way, the French way. Our captain's a smart chap, Ivanov: he knows languages and spouts German poetry by heart. Look here, young man! I've called you here to offer you to move over to my tent. It must be crowded and nasty there with the soldiers, six of you in a tent. Insects. You'll find it better here."

"Thank you, but I must refuse."

"Why? Nonsense! Nikita! Lug his pack over here! Which is your tent, the second?"

"Second on the right. If you don't mind, though, I'd prefer to stay there. I have to be with the soldiers most of the time. I'd rather stay there altogether."

The captain regarded me closely, as if trying to read my mind. After a moment's thought, he said:

"You want to be friends with them?"

"Yes, if that is possible."

"You are right. Stay there. You have my respect."

He seized my hand in his great paw and began pumping it vigorously.

Shortly afterwards I took my leave of the officers and left their tent. Night was falling; the men had put on their greatcoats in preparation for the evening roll-call. The companies lined up so that each battalion formed a closed square with the tents and piled arms inside it. On account of the day's halt the whole division had assembled. The drums beat the retreat, and from somewhere far away sounded the words of command for prayers.

Twelve thousand men bared their heads. "Our Father which art in heaven," our company began. The company next to us began chanting too. Sixty choirs of two hundred men each began singing each on its own. Despite the discord, the prayer sounded moving and solemn. Gradually the choirs died down; at last, far away, in a battalion standing at the end of the camp, the last company sang: "For thine is the kingdom. . . ." The drums beat a tattoo.

"Turn in!"

The soldiers went to bed. In our tent, where, as in all the others, six men were accommodated on forty-two square feet of space, my place was at the edge. I lay for a long time gazing at the stars, and the distant camp-fires, and listening to the faint hum of the multitudinous camp. In the tent next to ours someone was telling a fairy tale, endlessly repeating the words "so then."

"So then up comes the prince and begins to tell his wife off. So then. . . . Are you sleeping, Lyutikov? All right, sleep, God bless you. O Heavenly Father . . ." the story-teller whispered and fell silent.

From the officers' tent, too, came a murmur of conversation. The huge distorted shadows of the officers sitting in

the tent moved across the canvas, which was lit up from within. Once in a while there came a burst of laughter: that was the adjutant guffawing. A sentry with a rifle walked up and down; at the artillery's bivouac a little way off stood another sentry with drawn sword. From the horse lines every now and then came the stamp of hoofs and the snort of horses, who could be heard peacefully chewing their oats with the same kindly munching sound which I had often heard at home at some wayside inn on a similarly quiet starry night. The seven stars of the Great Bear shone low over the horizon, much lower than at home. Looking at the North Star, I thought that there, in that very direction, lay St. Petersburg, where I had left my mother, my friends, all that was dear to me. Familiar constellations shone overhead; the Milky Way was not just a blurred glimmer, but shone with a bright solemnly placid streak of light. In the south two large stars of some unfamiliar constellation not visible to us at home glowed with a red and greenish light. The thought struck me: "When we go farther beyond the Danube, beyond the Balkans, to Constantinople, will I see other new stars? What stars are they?"

I wasn't sleepy; I got up and wandered about over the damp grass between our battalion and the artillery. A dark figure drew level with me; I guessed by the clank of his sabre that it was an officer, and I stood at attention. The officer came up to me. It was Wenzel.

"You can't sleep, Ivanov?" he asked in his soft quiet voice.

"No, sir."

"My name is Wenzel. . . . I can't sleep either. I sat with your commander until I got fed up: they started playing ards, and they're all drunk. Ah, what a night!"

He walked at my side; on reaching the end of the line e turned back and walked up and down for a while aying nothing. Wenzel broke the silence.

"Tell me, did you join up of your own free will?"

"Yes."

"What made you do it?"

"What shall I say?" I answered, not wishing to go into details. "Most of all, of course, it was a desire to see and experience things."

"And probably to study the people in the person of its representative—the soldier?" said Wenzel.

It was dark and I could not see the expression of his face, but I caught the irony in his voice.

"Study, no! Who can think of study when your only thought is to hold out till the next halt and go to sleep!"

"Joking aside, though. Tell me why didn't you move over to your commander's tent? Do you mean to say you value the opinions of these peasants?"

"Of course, I value the opinion of everyone whom I have no reason to hold in disrespect."

"I have no reason to disbelieve you. Yes, it has become the latest fashion these days. Even literature elevates the muzhik and makes a sort of pearl of creation out of him."

"Who speaks about a pearl of creation, Wenzel! Good enough if he were simply recognized as a human being."

"Get on with you, using such pitiful words! Who doesn't recognize him? A human being?—very well, let him be a human being; what kind of human being—is another question. Let us talk about something else."

We dropped into conversation. Wenzel, apparently, had read a good deal, and, as Zaikin had said, knew foreign languages. The captain's remark about him "spouting poetry" also turned out to be correct: when we began speaking about the French, Wenzel, after railing at the naturalists, passed on to the forties and the thirties and even recited Alfred de Musset's *Nuit de décembre* with great feeling. He recited it well: simply and expressively, with a good French pronunciation. He paused when he had finished, then added:

"Yes, it's good; but all the French together are not worth a dozen lines of Schiller, Goethe or Shakespeare."

He had been in charge of the regimental library before taking over command of the company, and closely followed Russian literature too. In speaking of it, he severely condemned what he called the "boorish trend." The remark brought the conversation back to the former subject. Wenzel argued heatedly.

"When, almost a boy, I joined the regiment, I did not think the way I am talking to you now. I tried to act by means of the spoken word, tried to gain moral influence. But after a year of it, they wore me out. All that remained of the so-called good books on contact with reality proved to be sentimental nonsense. And now I think that the only way of making yourself understood is this!"

He made a gesture, but it was so dark that I could not make it out.

"What is that, Wenzel?"

"The fist!" he snapped. "Good night, it's time to go to bed."

I saluted and went to my tent. I felt both pained and disgusted.

In the tent I found everyone asleep, but a minute or two after I had lain down Fyodorov, who was sleeping next to me, said quietly:

"Are you sleeping, Ivanov?"

"No."

"Walking with Wenzel?"

"Yes."

"How's he with you? Good-tempered?"

"Well yes, rather friendly, I should say."

"That just shows you! One gentleman to another. Not the way he treats us."

"Why, does he show his temper?"

"Something awful! The men's jaws in the second rifle company take nasty cracks. He's a brute!"

Saying which, he immediately fell asleep, and all that I heard in response to my next question was his calm steady breathing. I wrapped my greatcoat about me; my thoughts wandered, then disappeared in a sound sleep.

III

The rains were followed by hot weather. Round about that time we struck off the country track, where our feet stuck in the mire, and emerged on to the highroad leading from Jassy to Bucharest. The first leg of the road march from Tecuci to Berlad will remain for ever in the memories of those who made it. It was ninety-five degrees in the shade; the march was forty-eight versts. The air was still; a fine limestone dust, raised by thousands of feet, hung over the road; it got into your nose and mouth, powdered your hair and disguised its colour; mingling with sweat it covered all faces with dirt and made men look like Negroes. For some reason we marched not in our shirts, but in uniforms. The sun heated the black cloth and beat down mercilessly on your head through the black cap; you could feel the scorching road metal through the soles of your boots. As luck would have it, the wells were few and far between, and most of them had so little water in them that the head of our column (the whole division was on the march) exhausted it, and all that we had after a terrible crush round the wells, was a thick clayey fluid more like mud than water. When there was not enough of it, men dropped in their tracks. Nearly ninety men dropped in the road that day in our battalion alone. Three died from sunstroke.

I bore the torture fairly well in comparison with others. It may have been because our regiment was recruited mostly from northerners, whereas I had been used to the heat of the steppes ever since a child; or some other cause may have been at work here. I had noticed that the com-

mon soldiers are apt to feel physical suffering more keenly than soldiers from the so-called privileged classes (I am speaking only of those who went to war of their own free will). For them, the common soldiers, physical distress was a real calamity, capable of making men acutely miserable. But those men who had enlisted voluntarily, although suffering physically worse than the common soldier, owing to their more delicate breeding, their comparatively weaker physique, and so on, enjoyed greater mental serenity. Their equanimity could not be disturbed by wayworn bleeding feet, the insufferable heat, and deadly fatigue. Never had I enjoyed such mental calm, never had I been at such peace with myself and the world at large as when I experienced these hardships and went out to kill men under flying bullets. This may sound queer and crazy, but I am writing only the truth.

However that may be, when others were dropping in the roadway I was in calm possession of my senses. In Tecuci I had provided myself with a huge gourd holding at least four bottles. I had filled it more than once during the march; half of that water I poured into myself, the rest I shared among my neighbours. A man would struggle on, but in the end succumb to the heat: his legs would begin to bend at the knees and he would stagger like a drunken man; through the layer of dirt and dust you could see his face going livid, and his hand convulsively gripping the rifle. A mouthful or two of water revives him for several minutes, but in the end he drops senseless on the hard dusty road. "Orderly!" hoarse voices shout. The duty of the orderly is to drag the fallen man to the roadside and render him assistance; but the orderly himself is in the same plight. The ditches on both sides of the road are strewn with sprawling bodies. Fyodorov and Zhitkov walked next to me, and although they were obviously suffering they bore up in manly fashion. The heat affected them in a curious way, reversed to their natures: Fyodorov

was silent and only sighed painfully every now and then, his fine eyes, now inflamed by the dust, glancing piteously at Uncle Zhitkov, who was swearing and philosophizing.

"Look at 'em dropping! Careful with that bayonet, damn you!" he shouted angrily, stepping aside to avoid the bayonet of a falling soldier, the point of which nearly got into his eye. "God Almighty! What have we done to rouse Thy wrath? If it wasn't for that brute I think I'd drop myself."

"What brute is that?" I asked.

"Captain Nemtsev. He's on duty today; marching behind us. Better keep going unless you want him to manhandle you. You'll be all bruises by the time he's finished with you."

I had known that the soldiers had changed Wenzel's name to "Nemtsev." It sounded similar, and Russian too.*

I left the ranks. At the side of the road the going was easier: there was less dust and jostling. Many men were walking at the roadsides: no one thought about keeping proper marching order that wretched day. I gradually dropped behind my company and found myself at the rear of the column.

Wenzel, utterly exhausted, caught up with me, panting but excited.

"How do you like it?" he said in a hoarse voice. "Let us walk at the side. I am completely fagged out."

"Do you want some water?"

He took several large gulps out of my gourd.

"Thanks, I feel better. What a day!"

We walked along together for a while in silence.

"By the way," he said, "you didn't move over to Zaikin's after all?"

"No."

"That's silly. Excuse me for being blunt. Good-bye; I

* Nemtsev—a Russian word meaning "German."—*Trans.*

must get back to the tail of the column. Too many of these delicate creatures are dropping."

After advancing several steps I turned my head and saw Wenzel bending over a fallen soldier and pulling him by the shoulder.

"Get up, you canaille! Get up!"

I did not recognize my cultured interlocutor. Coarse oaths poured from his mouth. The soldier was barely conscious, but he opened his eyes and looked at the enraged officer with a blank hopeless expression. His lips were whispering something.

"Get up! Get up this minute! What! You won't? Then take that, take that, take that!"

Wenzel seized his sabre scabbard and rained blows with it on the unfortunate man's weary weighted back. I could not stand it and went up to him.

"Wenzel!"

"Get up!" The hand with the sabre was lifted for another blow, but I gripped it before it could come down.

"For God's sake, Wenzel, leave the man be!"

He turned to me an infuriated face. With eyes blazing and mouth twisted convulsively, he looked terrible. He wrenched his arm free with a fierce movement. I thought that my effrontery would bring a storm of anger down upon my head (seizing an officer by the hand was sheer insolence), but he kept his temper.

"Look here, Ivanov, never do that again! If some rude upstart had been in my place, someone like Shchurov or Timofeyev, you would have paid dear for that joke of yours. You mustn't forget that you are a private and are liable to be summarily shot for things like that."

"I don't care. I couldn't look on without taking the man's part."

"That does you credit. But your tender feelings are misplaced. How else can you treat these. . . ." (His face expressed contempt, nay more—something akin to hatred.)

"Of all these dozens who have dropped like old women there are probably only a few who are really exhausted by the heat. I am not doing it out of cruelty—it isn't in me. You've got to maintain discipline. If they could be talked to I would have tried persuasion. But the word means nothing to them. The only thing they feel is physical pain."

I did not stay to hear any more, and hastened off to catch up with my company. I overtook Fyodorov and Zhitkov when our battalion had been turned off the road into a field and commanded to halt.

"What were you talking with Captain Wenzel about?" asked Fyodorov, as I dropped beside him utterly exhausted before I had barely piled my rifle.

"Talking!" Zhitkov growled. "Do you call that talking? He caught hold of his hand. Take my advice, sir, you be careful with Nemtsev. The fact that he likes to talk to you doesn't mean anything. He'll be the ruin of you!"

IV

Late that evening we reached Fokshani, passed through the dark silent and dusty little town and came into a field. The battalions bivouacked in the pitch dark, and the worn-out men fell asleep at once; hardly anyone ate the "dinner" which had been prepared for them. The soldier's meal is always "dinner," no matter whether it happens early in the morning, in the daytime or at night. The rest straggled in all through the night. At dawn we marched out again, comforting ourselves with the thought that after the next march a day's halt would be called.

Once more the moving ranks; once more the leaden weight of the pack on benumbed shoulders, the ache of stiff blistered feet. For the first ten versts you are scarcely awake. The brief sleep has not removed the fatigue of the previous day, and the men walk along almost sleeping. I

have had that happen to me several times, so much so that when we halted for a rest I could not believe that we had done ten versts, and I did not remember a single spot of the way we had travelled. It is only when the halt order is given and the column draws up and reforms for the occasion do you wake up and think with pleasure of the full hour's rest in which you can disburden, boil yourself some water in your mess-tin and lie at ease, drinking hot tea. As soon as the rifles are piled and the kits thrown off, most of the men start collecting fuel—usually the dry stalks of last year's maize. Two bayonets are stuck into the ground and a ramrod laid across them, from which two or three mess-tins are suspended. The dry crumbly stalks burn with a bright merry flame; the fire is always built on the windward side; the flames lick the smoky tins, and within ten minutes the water in them is boiling merrily. The tea is thrown straight into the tin and boiled to a strong almost black brew, which is drunk for the most part without sugar, as the authorities, while issuing a lot of tea (the men sometimes smoked it when tobacco was short), issued very little sugar, and tea was drunk in vast amounts. The mess-tin, containing seven glasses, was the usual portion for one man.

It may seem strange that I enlarge on all these trivial details. But a soldier's life on the march is so hard, so full of privations and suffering, and with so little hope for a happy issue in prospect, that even a small thing like tea or other similar little luxury was a great joy to him. One should have seen the grave pleased faces of those grim, rough, weather-beaten soldiers, young and old—true, there was no one among us over forty—as they fed the fire under the tins with bits of sticks and stalks, like children, tending it carefully, and advising one another:

"Shove it in here, on the edge, Lyutikov! That's right. That's done the trick. We'll soon have it boiling."

Tea, and occasionally—in cold and rainy weather—a

glass of vodka and a pipe of tobacco–that was the soldier's sole delight, not counting, of course, all-healing sleep, which brings forgetfulness of physical distress and of thoughts of the dark and dismal future. Tobacco played no small part among these blessings of life, stimulating and sustaining as it did the men's overwrought nerves. The hard-packed pipe made the round of a dozen men and returned to its owner, who took a last puff at it before knocking out the dottle and solemnly putting the pipe away in the top of his boot. I remember how upset I was at having my pipe lost by a comrade to whom I had given it to have a smoke, and how upset and ashamed he was himself. Anyone would think he had lost a fortune that had been entrusted to him.

At one noonday halt we rested about an hour and a half or two hours. After drinking tea everyone usually took a nap. All was still at the bivouac, save for the sentry who paced up and down near the standard, and some of the officers, who had not gone to sleep. You lie on the ground with the kit under your head in a state between sleep and wakefulness; the hot sun beats down on your face and neck, the pestering flies crawl over you and do not let you fall asleep. Dreams mingle with reality; not so long ago you had been living a life so utterly unlike this one, that it seems to you, in this semi-conscious state of drowsiness, as if you will awake at any moment to find yourself at home amid familiar surroundings, while this steppe, this bare earth with prickles instead of grass, this merciless sun and dry wind, this thousand of men oddly clad in white dust-covered shirts, and these rifles standing in piles, will all disappear. It is all like a queer distressing dream. . . .

"Reveille!" rings out the harsh drawn-out command issued by Major Chernoglazov, our bearded little battalion commander.

The prostrate crowd of white shirts begins to stir; grunt-

ing and stretching, the men get up, put on their cartridge pouches and kits and fall into line.

"To arms!"

We take our rifles from the stack. I still remember my rifle No. 18635 with a butt-stock slightly darker than the others and with a long scratch running down the dark varnish. Another command—and the battalion, stringing out, turns off on to the road. The commander's bay horse Barbarian is led by the bridle at the head of the column; prancing, his neck arched, he paws the ground; the major mounts him only on rare occasions, and is constantly to be found marching at the head of the battalion behind Barbarian with the steady stride of the true infantryman. He is showing the men that their officers are "doing their bit" too, and the men like him for it. He is always cool and unruffled, never jokes or smiles; he is the first to get up in the morning and the last to turn in in the evening; he treats the men firmly and without familiarity, and never uses his fists or shouts without reason. They say that if not for the major, Wenzel would have done still worse things.

It is hot today, but not so hot as yesterday. Besides, we are marching not on the highroad but along a narrow country track alongside the railway, so that most of us are walking on the grass. There is no dust; the sky clouds over and heavy raindrops come down in fitful spatters. We look up at the sky and hold our hands out to see whether it is raining. Even yesterday's stragglers have cheered up; we haven't far to go, only about ten versts or so, and then rest, the longed-for rest, not for the duration of one brief night, but for a night, a whole day and another night. The heartened men are moved to sing; Fyodorov, among the leaders, is singing away for all he is worth; one can hear the famous song:

It was at the battle of Poltava. . . .

After reaching the line about the treacherous bullet that

pierced the royal hat, he switches over to a senseless ribald song, very popular among the soldiers, concerning a certain Liza, who went to the woods and found a black beetle, and what came of it. This is followed by another historical song about Tsar Peter being called before the Senate. The crowning stroke is the home-made song of our regiment:

When the Tsar comes on his steed, 'tis a splendid sight indeed.
All the soldiers stand in rows, spick and span from cap to toes.
And our rifle exercise gives the Tsar a nice surprise.
The battalion commander with a voice as loud as thunder
Never slept nor ate his fill, but made us drill and drill and drill.
On his horse he sat all day, prouder than a popinjay.

And fifty more couplets in the same vein.

"Fyodorov," I once asked him, "why do you sing that drivel about Liza?" I named several more songs, ridiculous and cynical to such a degree that their very cynicism was rendered meaningless and took the shape of absolutely senseless sounds.

"Oh, it's just a habit, sir. That's not singing. It's just sort of yelling for chest exercise. And it helps you to step out livelier."

When the singers grow tired, the musicians strike up. It is much easier to walk to the rhythmic tune of a loud and for the most part rollicking march; everyone, no matter how tired, braces himself and steps out with a swaggering air, keeping in step with the others; the battalion is hardly recognizable. I remember once marching to the music and covering over six versts in an hour without feeling tired; but when the exhausted musicians stopped playing and the stimulation of the music had disappeared, I

felt as if I would drop at any moment, and would probably have done so had not a halt been called.

Some five versts' distance after the halt we came up against an obstacle. We were passing through the valley of a small river; on one side were hills, on the other a narrow and fairly high railway embankment. The recent rains had flooded the valley, forming a large puddle in our path about two hundred feet wide. The railway track rose above it like a dam, and we had to pass over it. The railway guard allowed the first battalion to pass, and then declared that we would have to wait, as a train would be going through in five minutes. We had halted and just piled our rifles when the familiar carriage of the brigadier-general made its appearance.

Our brigadier-general was a gallant soldier. I had never met anyone either on the operatic stage or in any church choir with vocal cords to match those that he possessed. His booming bass shook the air like a trumpet blast, and his big burly figure with its fat red head, huge iron-grey whiskers fluttering in the wind, and thick black eyebrows over coal-black glittering little eyes, when he sat his horse and commanded the brigade, was impressive to a degree. One day, during some military exercises on the Khodynka field in Moscow, he had cut such a fine martial figure that an old gentleman standing in the crowd of bystanders was utterly delighted and had cried out aloud:

"That's a war horse! That's the kind of men we need!"

The nickname War Horse had stuck to the general ever since.

He dreamed of deeds of valour. Several small volumes of military history accompanied him throughout the campaign. His favourite conversation with the officers was criticism of Napoleon's campaigns. Naturally, I knew this only by hearsay, as I had seldom seen our general; for the most part he overtook us in the middle of the march in his carriage, drawn by a fine troika, arrived at the halting-

place, occupied lodgings there till late in the morning and overtook us again during the day. Every time he did so the soldiers noted the degree of lividness of his countenance, and the hoarseness of his terrific voice when he shouted to us:

"How do you do, Starobeltsy!"

The soldiers answered him with the usual chorused greeting, to which they added: "The War Horse is going to have a hair of the dog!"

And the general would drive on, sometimes without consequences, and sometimes giving one or another company commander a thunderous wigging.

Seeing the halted battalion, the general flew up and jumped out of the carriage as fast as his corpulence would allow him. The major hastened up to him.

"What's the matter? Why have you stopped? Who gave you permission?"

"The road is flooded, Your Excellency, and a train will soon be passing."

"Road flooded? A train? Nonsense! You're making softies out of the men! Bunch of old washer-women! You're disobeying orders! I'll put you under arrest, sir!"

"Your Excellency. . . ."

"None of your talk!"

The general's glaring eyes travelled round and alighted on another victim.

"What's that? Why isn't the commander of the 2nd Rifle Company in his place? Captain Wenzel, come here!"

Wenzel went up. He received the full blast of the general's wrath. I heard him raise his voice, trying to say something, but the general shouted him down. Wenzel must have said something disrespectful, because the general roared:

"Arguing?! Insolence! Silence! Take his sabre off. Put him under arrest! Example to others. Scared by a puddle! Come on, boys! The Suvorov way!"

The general strode past the battalion towards the water with the awkward gait of a man who had long been travelling in a carriage.

"Follow me, boys! The Suvorov way!" he repeated, and entered the water in his patent-leather wellingtons. The major looked back with a scowling face and followed at the general's side. The battalion took off in his wake. The water at first was knee-deep, but then it rose to the waist and kept rising; the tall general strode along easily, but the little major was already floundering and threshing his arms about. The soldiers jostled each other, slithered about on the muddy bottom, and veered from side to side like a flock of sheep being driven across a river. The company commanders and the battalion adjutant, being on horseback, could have ridden comfortably through the puddle, but seeing the example the general was setting, they dismounted on reaching it, and leading the horses by their bridles, stepped into the muddy water churned up by hundreds of feet. Our company, which had the tallest men in the battalion, crossed fairly comfortably, but the 8th Company of short men following us floundered in the puddle almost up to their ears; some of them had swallowed water and clutched at us, gasping. One little fellow, a Gypsy, with a face as white as a sheet and dilated black eyes, threw his rifle away and clutched Zhitkov round the neck with both arms. Luckily for him someone caught the rifle before it could sink. After about twenty-five yards the puddle grew shallower, and everyone scrambled out, pushing and swearing. Many of our men were laughing, but those of the 8th Company were in no laughing mood: the faces of many of them were blue, but not only from the cold. The riflemen were pressing forward from behind them.

"Come on there, toddlers!" they shouted. "Mind you don't drown!"

"It's all right for you, you haven't even wetted your

whiskers!" those of the 8th retorted. "Thinks himself a hero, he does! A fellow can drown here easy as can be."

"You should have hopped into my mess-tin. I'd have carried you across dry."

"It's a pity I didn't think of it, old chap," the little soldier answered his chaffing mates good-humouredly.

The culprit of all that commotion had meanwhile pulled his feet out of the viscid mud, and now stood on the bank, a majestic figure, surveying the mass of men floundering in the water. He was wet to the skin and even to the tips of his long whiskers. The water trickled down his clothes, and the patent-leather tops of his boots, filled with water, were distended. Yet he shouted encouragement to the soldiers:

"Forward, lads! The Suvorov way!"

The wet officers, with sullen faces, huddled round him. Wenzel was there, too, stripped of his sabre, his face distorted. The general's coachman, after walking up and down the bank, poking the handle of his whip in the water, had clambered back on to the box and safely crossed the puddle a little to one side of us, the water there barely reaching the hub of the wheels.

"That is where we should have crossed, Your Excellency," the major said. "May the men be permitted to dry themselves?"

"Certainly, certainly, Major," the general said, now appeased. The cold water had cooled his ardour. He got into his carriage, sat down, then stood up again and shouted at the top of his terrific voice:

"Thanks, Starobeltsy! Good lads!"

The men answered in a straggly chorus, and the wet general rode off.

The sun was still high in the sky, and we had only five more versts to go; the major called a long halt. We undressed, kindled camp-fires, and dried our clothes, boots

and kits, and within two hours had started off again, recollecting our recent bath with laughter.

"The War Horse had Wenzel put under arrest, though!" Fyodorov said.

"Never mind, a couple of days behind the money-box will only do him good," one of the riflemen marching behind spoke up.

"What's he done to you?"

"Nothing. But the whole company will breathe easier. At least we'll be rid of him for a couple of days. It's as much as anyone can stand."

"Patience, Cossack, and you'll be an ataman one day."

"Patience, yes, but we'll be atamans in the next world, I'm afraid," Zhitkov said in his usual gloomy tone. "Especially if a Turk gets you."

"Don't be down-hearted, Dad. You just think: here are we walking nice and dry while the War Horse is trundling along wet," Fyodorov said amid laughter.

V

We were marching alongside the railway track all the time; trains filled with men, horses and munitions kept overtaking us. The soldiers gazed with envy at the goods waggons as they sped past with their loads of horses looking out through the open doors.

"Horses have all the honour these days! And we have to walk!"

"A horse is a stupid animal, it will lose flesh," declared Karpov. "That's what you're a man for, to take proper care of yourself."

Once, during a halt, a Cossack came galloping up with an important message. Our officers lined us up in our white shirts without our kits or rifles. None of us knew what it was all about. The officers inspected the men, Wenzel, as usual, shouting and swearing, tugging at belts

that had not been put on properly, and ordering men with a kick to put their shirts straight. Then we were marched down to the railway track and after a good deal of parading, the regiment was strung out along the track in two ranks. The white line of shirts ran out for over half a mile.

"Boys!" shouted the major. "His Majesty the Tsar is riding past!"

And we all began waiting for the Tsar. Our division was a rather remote one, stationed a long way from St. Petersburg and Moscow. Probably no more than one man out of ten of us had ever seen the Tsar, and everyone looked forward eagerly to the royal train. Half an hour passed, but no train appeared; the men were allowed to sit down. They began to talk, telling stories.

"I wonder if he'll stop?" someone said.

"Don't be silly! Can you see him stopping for every blessed regiment? Be content if he just looks at us out of the window."

"We won't even be able to make out who's who: there are so many generals travelling with him."

"I'll make him out all right! I saw him that near, at Khodynka the year before last," one soldier said, holding his hand out by way of illustrating how closely he had seen the Tsar.

At last, after a two hours' wait, a wisp of smoke appeared in the distance. The regiment lined up. A service train with a kitchen passed first. The cooks and kitchen-boys in white caps looked out at us from the windows and laughed for some reason or other. Some five hundred yards behind it came the royal train; seeing the regiment lined up along the track the engine-driver slowed down, and the carriages rolled past slowly before the eager staring eyes fixed upon the windows. But the windows were curtained off, and the Cossack and officer standing on the platform of the last carriage were the only people in the

train whom we saw. We looked at the rapidly retreating train, stood there for another two or three minutes, then returned to our bivouac. The men were disappointed and expressed their chagrin.

"God knows when we'll see him now!"

But we saw him before long. At Ploesti we were told that the Tsar was going to review us in that town.

We marched past him just as we were, in the same dirty white shirts and trousers, the same dusty rust-coloured boots, and with the same staggering load of kit, biscuit bags, and bottles dangling from strings. The soldier had nothing dashing, swaggering or heroic about him; he looked more like an ordinary muzhik than anything, and only the rifle and the cartridge-pouch that he carried indicated that that muzhik was going to the war. We had been drawn up in a narrow column of four men abreast, otherwise we could not have passed through the narrow streets of the town. I marched on the outside, trying hard not to fall out of step, and thinking that if the Tsar and his retinue stood on my side I would pass before his eyes and very close to him. Glancing at Zhitkov, who was marching along next to me, his habitually gloomy face looking somewhat excited, I felt that some of the general excitement was communicating itself to me too, and that my heart began to beat faster. It suddenly struck me that everything depended on the way the Tsar would look at us. Eventually, when I came under fire for the first time, I experienced a similar kind of feeling.

The men walked faster and faster, and their stride grew longer, easier and steadier. I did not have to make any effort to fall in with the general rhythm—all tiredness had gone. It was as if I had grown wings which were bearing me onward to where the music rang out and deafening cheers shook the air. I do not remember the streets through which we passed, or whether there were any people in the streets looking at us; all I remember

was the excitement that gripped my heart together with a realization of the terrible power of the mass to which I belonged and which was sweeping me along with it. I felt that there was nothing impossible for that mass, that the torrent with which I was being borne along and of which I formed a part, knew no obstacles, that it would break down, crush and destroy everything that stood in its path. And everyone was thinking that the man before whom that torrent would sweep past, could, by a single word, a single gesture, alter its course, turn it back, or fling it forward once more against terrible barriers; and everyone sought in the word of that one man, in the movement of his hand, that unknown force that was leading us to our death. "You are leading us," everyone thought, "we are placing our lives in your hands; look at us and rest assured that we are prepared to die."

And he knew that we were prepared to die. He saw the ranks of men, grim and terrible in their purpose, passing before him almost at a run, men of his own poor country, rough, poorly clad soldiers. He felt that they were all going forward to meet their death calmly and free of responsibility. He sat upon a grey horse that stood motionless with ears pricked to the music and the wild shouts of ecstasy. Around him stood his magnificent retinue; but I remember none of that brilliant troop of horsemen except that one figure on the grey horse in simple uniform and white cap. I remember the pale, worn face, troubled by the weight of the decision that had been taken. I remember the tears that poured down his face and fell upon the dark cloth of his uniform in bright shining drops; I remember the convulsive movement of his hand that held the bridle, and the quivering lips that murmured something, probably a greeting to the thousands of doomed young lives for whom he was weeping. All this appeared and vanished as in a flicker of lightning, during which I ran past him, breathless, not from running, but

from sheer delirious ecstasy, in one hand my rifle raised aloft, in the other waving my cap over my head and shouting "hurrah!" with all the strength of my lungs, my own voice drowned in the deafening uproar.

It was all over in a flash. Dusty streets, flooded in blazing sunshine, thirsty soldiers worn out by the excitement, the heat and the quick run of nearly a mile, the shouts of the officers demanding that everyone should march in line and in step—that was all I saw and heard five minutes later. And when, after marching another mile through the stuffy town, we came to a common assigned to us for our bivouac, I flung myself down on the ground utterly exhausted in body and soul.

VI

Gruelling marches, dust, heat, fatigue, blistered feet, brief rests during the day, the sleep of the dead at night, the hateful bugle rousing you from it at peep of dawn. And nothing but fields and fields, so unlike our native ones, covered with tall green maize loudly rustling its long silky leaves, or with rich wheat that was beginning to turn yellow.

The same faces, the same regimental marching life, the same talks and stories about home, about billeting in the gubernia town, and gossip about the officers.

Men spoke rarely and reluctantly about the future. They had only a dim idea of what they were going to fight for, although we stood outside Kishinev for six months, preparing to take the field; during that time the meaning of the forthcoming war could have been explained to them, but evidently that was not considered necessary. I remember a soldier once asking me:

"Will it be long before we reach the land of Bokhara, Mr. Ivanov?"

I thought at first that I had misheard, but when he re-

peated the question, I answered that the land of Bokhara was about three thousand miles away and that we would hardly ever get there.

"You're talking different now, sir. The clerk told me we'd be there as soon as we crossed the Danube."

"You mean Bulgaria!" I exclaimed.

"What's the difference—Bulgaria or Bokhara, as you call it."

And he fell silent, obviously nettled.

All we knew was that we were going to fight the bashi-bazouks because they had shed so much blood. And we wanted to beat them not so much because of the unknown blood they had shed as because they had disturbed such a mass of people, because, through them, we had had to make this difficult march ("dragging us all these thousands of miles, the dirty heathens!"), and dischargees had had to leave their homes and families, and all of us together had had to go out somewhere and face the bullets and the cannon-balls. We thought of the Turks as trouble-makers and rebels, who had to be put down and subdued.

Our domestic affairs—regimental, battalion and company life—occupied us far more than the war. In our company it was quiet and peaceful, but with the riflemen things were going from bad to worse. Wenzel was still at it; feeling ran high, and after one incident, which even now, after the lapse of five years, I cannot recall without deep agitation, this resentment hardened into real hatred.

We had just passed through some town and come out on to a meadow, where the regiment ahead of us had already bivouacked. It was a pleasant spot: on one side a river, on the other a wood of old oak, probably the pleasure ground of the local inhabitants. It was a fine warm evening; the sun was setting. The regiment halted; the rifles were piled. Zhitkov and I began to pitch our tent. We put up the poles, then Zhitkov drove the pegs in while I held the edge of the canvas.

"Draw it tighter, Ivanov, that's right," Zhitkov said. (He had dropped the formal "sir" with me some days before.)

Just then I heard odd regular splashing sounds behind me. I looked round.

The riflemen were standing at attention, while Wenzel, shouting hoarsely, was smacking one of the men across the face. Pale as death, not daring to dodge the blows, the soldier stood holding his rifle at his foot, his whole body trembling. Wenzel's small slim body twisted with the blows, which he dealt with both hands, now from the right, now from the left. There was a hush all round, broken only by the smacking noises and the hoarse mutterings of the infuriated officer. Everything went dark before my eyes, and I made a movement. Zhitkov understood it, and gave the canvas a hard jerk.

"Hold it, damn you!" he shouted with a foul oath. "Have your arms withered off, or what? What are you gaping at!"

The blows continued to fall. Blood was trickling down the soldier's upper lip and chin. At last he dropped. Wenzel turned away, glared at the company and shouted:

"If anyone else dares to smoke in the ranks I'll give him a worse thrashing, the rascal. Pick him up, wash his ugly mug, and lay him in the tent. Let him come to. Pile arms!" he commanded.

His hands were shaking; they were red and swollen, and covered with blood. He took out a handkerchief, wiped them, and came away from the men, who were piling their arms in a heavy silence. Several of them, muttering among themselves, fussed around the beaten man and picked him up. Wenzel walked away with the nervous gait of an exhausted man; he was pale, and his eyes glittered; the tensed muscles of his face showed that his teeth were clenched. Passing me and meeting my compelling gaze, he smiled an unnatural mocking smile with his thin lips alone, murmured something and passed on.

"The blood-sucker!" Zhitkov said with hatred in his voice. "You are a fine one, too, sir! Asking for trouble! Want to face the firing squad? You wait, he'll get his deserts."

"Do you mean they'll complain?" I said. "Who to?"

"No, they won't complain. We'll be going into action sooner or later. . . ."

And he muttered something half to himself. I was afraid to understand him. Meanwhile Fyodorov, who had gone to have a chat with the riflemen, had returned.

"Just tormenting the men for nothing at all," he said. "That soldier, Matyushkin, was smoking on the march, and when they halted and the command was given to order arms, he held the cigarette between his fingers; he must have forgotten about it, worse for him. And Wenzel caught him.

"The brute!" he added sadly, crawling into the tent which had already been set up. "The cigarette had gone out, too. The poor devil had clean forgotten about it."

Several days later we arrived in Alexandria, where large forces had been mustered. Coming down the high hill we saw a vast area dotted with white tents, the black figures of men, long horse lines and glinting rows of brass cannon and green gun-carriages and ammunition waggons. Crowds of officers and soldiers walked about the town.

From the open windows of the dirty little hotels came the sad and lively sounds of Hungarian music, the clatter of plates and noisy talk; the shops were crowded with Russian customers. Our soldiers, the Rumanians, Germans, and Jews shouted to each other, none of them understanding a word; arguments about the exchange of the paper ruble could be heard at every step.

"What have you given me *două galagani** for, you black devil? I want ten kopeks! Hi you, *domnule*!"**

"*Unde este poșta?*" an officer, armed with a military phrase book, inquired with exaggerated politeness of a Rumanian dandy, whom he accosted with a salute. The Rumanian told him; the officer thumbed through his book, looking for the unintelligible words, and thanked the Rumanian most politely, although he had not understood a thing.

"These people here are the damned limit! They have the same priests and churches as we have, mind you, but they've got no ideas about anything! Want a silver ruble?" a soldier with a shirt in his hands yells at the top of his voice at a Rumanian stall-keeper. "For this shirt here? *Patru franci*? Four francs?"

He took out a coin and showed it, and the transaction was concluded to their mutual satisfaction.

"Make way there, countrymen, a general is coming!"

A tall young general in a spruce coat, high boots and a riding whip on a belt slung across his shoulder, passed quickly down the street. Several paces behind him followed his batman, a little Asiatic in a coloured oriental robe and turban, with a huge sabre and a revolver at his belt. Holding his head high and glancing with cheerful indifference at the saluting soldiers who made way for him, the general passed into the hotel. Here, ensconced in a corner of the restaurant, sat Captain Zaikin, Stebelkov and I, consuming a local dish consisting of cayenne and meat. The shabby room, set with little tables, was crowded. The clatter of dishes, the popping of corks, the hum of voices, sober and tipsy, were all drowned out by the band, which sat in a kind of niche adorned with red fustian curtains. There were five musicians: two fiddlers were scraping away with gusto, a cello played the second part in monotonous

* Two coins.
** Mister.

droning tones, a double-bass roared, and all these instruments together merely formed a background for the fifth musician, a swarthy curly-haired Hungarian, a boy almost, who sat in the front with a curious instrument, an ancient syrinx, like that which Pan and the fauns are pictured with, thrust behind the wide collar of his velvet jacket. It consisted of a row of uneven wooden pipes bound together with the open ends on a level with the player's lips. Twisting his head from side to side, the Hungarian blew into these pipes, from which he produced powerful melodious sounds resembling neither a flute nor a clarinet. He contrived a variety of tricky and difficult passages, shaking and twisting his head all the time; his black greasy hair danced on his head and fell over his forehead; his perspiring face was red and the veins on his neck swollen. Obviously, he was having no easy time of it. Against the discordant background of the string instruments the notes of the panpipe stood out sharply, distinctly and wildly beautiful.

The general took a seat at a table occupied by officers of his acquaintance, bowed to all who had got up at his entrance and said loudly: "Sit down, gentlemen!" (this was meant for the rank and file). We finished our meal in silence; Zaikin ordered Rumanian red wine, and after the second bottle, when his face brightened and his nose and cheeks took on a more cheerful hue, he turned to me, saying:

"Look here, young man.... You remember the long march, don't you?"

"I do, Captain."

"You had a talk with Wenzel then, didn't you?"

"I did."

"You seized his hand?" the captain said in an unnaturally grave tone. And when I answered that I had, he let out a long gusty sigh and blinked his eyes worriedly.

"That was a bad thing to do. A silly thing! I'm not

blaming you for it, mind you. You acted nobly . . . I mean, it was a breach of discipline. . . . Confound it, what nonsense I'm talking! Excuse me please. . . ."

He fell silent, staring at the floor and puffing. I was silent too. He swallowed half a glass, then slapped my knee.

"Promise me you won't do that again. I understand you. It's hard for a new man. But what can you do with him? He's like a mad dog, that Wenzel! But the thing is. . . ."

The captain was obviously at a loss for words, and after another long pause he resorted to the glass again.

"I mean to say . . . he's not a bad chap, really. I can't make out what gets into him. I took a jab at a soldier myself the other day—you probably saw me. Just a light tap. You can't help it when the idiot doesn't understand his own fool-trick—just a lump of wood, you know. . . . But, upon my word, it's all done in a fatherly way. No malice in it really, although I do lose my temper sometimes. But he's made it a system. Hi, you!" he shouted to the Rumanian waiter, "*Oşte vin negru*! Some more wine! He'll have the law on him one day, if not something worse: the men will get mad with him, and as soon as we go into action. . . . It will be a pity, because he's a decent chap, really. A warm-hearted fellow, I should say."

"Oh, come," drawled Stebelkov. "What warm-hearted man will use his fists the way he does."

"You should have seen what that warm-hearted man of yours did recently," I said, and told the captain how Wenzel had beaten the soldier over a cigarette.

"There, that's him all over!" Zaikin puffed, reddening, then resumed again after a pause: "He's not a brute, though. Whose men are best fed? Wenzel's. Whose men are best trained? Wenzel's. In whose unit are there practically no penalties? Whose men are never court-martialled —unless, that is, some soldier has done something outrageous? Again Wenzel's. Really, if it wasn't for that

unfortunate weakness of his, his men would make the deuce of a fuss of him."

"Did you ever speak to him about it, Captain?"

"I did, and quarrelled with him a dozen times over it. But it's no use. 'It's either an army or a militia!' he says. Makes up stupid phrases like that all the time. 'War,' he says, 'is such a cruelty, that if I am cruel to the soldiers it is a drop in the ocean. They stand on such a low level of development,' he says. Disgusting, really! Yet he's a fine fellow. He doesn't drink, doesn't gamble, knows his business, helps his old father and his sister, and is an excellent comrade! Educated man, too. No one in the regiment comes up to him. And take my word for it, he'll either have the law on him or those out there"—jerking his head towards the window—"will take the law into their own hands. A bad business. So that's how it is, my dear private Ivanov."

He patted me kindly on the shoulder, then slipped his hand into his pocket, drew out his tobacco pouch and began to roll himself a thick cigarette. He put it into a huge amber-tipped cigarette-holder inscribed in niello with the word "Caucasus," stuck it into his mouth and handed the pouch to me in silence. We all three lit up, and the captain proceeded:

"You can't help boxing their ears sometimes. They're like children, really. Do you know Balunov?"

Stebelkov suddenly burst out laughing.

"What are you laughing at!" the captain grumbled. "He's an old soldier; an old offender, too. He's been serving these twenty years—can't get his discharge because of it. Well, that rascal. . . . You weren't here at the time. Well, somewhere near Kishinev we were coming out of a village one day, and got orders to inspect everyone's emergency pair of boots. I lined the men up and walked behind them to see if the tops of the boots were sticking out of their packs. Balunov's didn't show anything. 'Where are your

boots?' I says. 'Inside the kit, sir.' 'You're a liar!' 'No, sir, I put 'em inside so's to keep 'em dry!' He was so glib, the rascal. 'Take your kit off, undo it!' Instead of undoing it, he starts pulling the boots out of it by their tops. 'Undo it!' 'There's no need to, sir, I can pull them out.' But I made him undo it. And what do you think? He pulled a live little pig out of his kit by the ears! Had its snout tied up with a bit of string, too, so that it didn't squeal. Stood there pulling a respectful face, one hand saluting, the other holding the pig. Stole it from a Moldavian woman, the scoundrel. Well, of course, I fetched him a light cuff."

Stebelkov was holding his sides with laughter.

"Yes, but what with?" he managed to bring out. "The captain hit him with the pig. Oh-ho-ho! He snatched that piglet and laid about with it!"

"Was there really any need to do that, Captain?"

"Oh, come! Man alive, what was I to do then—send him up for court-martial?"

VII

On the night of June the 15th Fyodorov woke me up.

"Hear that, Ivanov?"

"What is it?"

"Shooting. They're crossing the Danube."

I lay listening. A strong wind was blowing, and black scuttling clouds screened the face of the moon; gusts of wind buffeted the railway track, hummed among the tent ropes and whistled shrilly in the stacked rifles. Through these sounds an occasional heavy thud could be heard.

"Someone's getting it," Fyodorov whispered with a sigh. "I wonder if we'll be ordered out? What do you think? Hear 'em blazing away! Sounds like thunder."

"Perhaps it is a thunderstorm?"

"Oh no. It's too regular for that. Hear it? One after another, one after another."

The thunderclaps, indeed, came at regular intervals. I crawled out of the tent and looked in the direction of the firing. There were no gun flashes. Sometimes the straining eye seemed to catch a flash of light from where the guns were firing, but that was only an illusion.

"Here it is, at last!" I thought.

And I tried to imagine what was going on out there in the darkness. In my mind's eye I saw a broad black river with steep banks, quite unlike the real Danube I was afterwards to see. Hundreds of boats were crossing it, and those steady rapid shots were being fired at them. How many of them would survive? A cold shiver ran through my body. "Would you care to be there now?" I could not help asking myself.

I looked at the sleeping camp; all was quiet; the distant thunder of the guns and the booming gusts of wind were punctuated by the peaceful snores of the men. Suddenly I passionately wished that all this should not be, that the march should still drag on, that these peaceful sleepers, and I with them, should not have to go out to where those guns were roaring.

Sometimes the cannonade grew intenser; sometimes I caught faint sounds less deep. "That's rifle fire," I thought, not knowing that the Danube was thirteen miles away and that those faint sounds were but the morbid creation of a straining ear. Unreal though they were, they set the imagination working, painting ghastly scenes. I fancied I could hear screams and groans, I pictured thousands of men lying prostrate, heard wild hoarse cheers, the rush of a bayonet attack, a carnage. And what if they were repulsed and all this had been in vain?

The dark east was greying; the wind had dropped. The clouds had scattered, and dying stars could be seen here and there in the paling green-tinged sky. Day began to break; some men in the camp woke up, and the others were roused by the sounds of battle. Men spoke quietly,

and little was said. The unknown had now come up close: no one knew what the morrow would bring, and no one wanted to think or speak about that morrow.

I fell asleep at dawn and woke up rather late. The guns were still rumbling, and although there was no news from the Danube, rumours each more incredible than the other circulated among us. Some said that our troops had already crossed and were driving the Turks before them, others that the crossing had failed and that whole regiments had been wiped out.

"Some were drowned, some were shot dead," one of the soldiers said.

"You can fib, you can," Karpov cut him short.

"I'm not fibbing, it's the truth."

"The truth! Who told you?"

"What?"

"Where did you get the story from? We all know that there's shooting going on, and that's about all we do know."

"Everyone says so. A Cossack came to the general. . . ."

"A Cossack! Did you see him? What does he look like, that Cossack of yours?"

"Just an ordinary Cossack as Cossacks go. . . ."

"You've got a long woman's tongue, you have. You'd better shut up. There hasn't been anyone, and nobody knows anything."

I went up to Captain Zaikin. The officers were sitting in full readiness, their revolvers strapped to their belts. The captain, as usual, was red, puffing and blowing, and wiping his neck with a dirty handkerchief. Stebelkov was excited and radiant; for some reason, he had waxed up his little moustache, which had formerly hung limp.

"Look at our subaltern! He has smartened himself up before going into action," the captain said, winking at him. "Ah, Stebelkov, Stebelkov! I'm sorry for you! We'll miss

those moustaches in the officers' mess!" he said in a mock-plaintive tone. "Aren't you in a funk?"

"I'll try not to be," Stebelkov answered cheerfully.

"What about you, warrior, aren't you afraid?"

"I don't know myself, Captain," I said. "Is there any news from over there?"

"Nothing. God knows what's going on there," Zaikin said with a painful sigh. "We set out at one o'clock," he added after a pause.

The tent flap was turned back, and adjutant Lukin poked his head in; his face, for once, was pale and grave.

"You here, Ivanov? Orders have been given for you to be sworn in. Not now—when we set out. Captain, have a fifth clip issued to the men."

He declined to come in and sit down, pleading that he was busy, and ran off. I went out too.

By twelve o'clock dinner was ready. The man ate poorly. After dinner the order was given to take the muzzle caps off the rifles, and extra cartridges were handed out. The soldiers prepared for action, going over their kits and throwing away all superfluous articles. They threw out torn shirts and breeches, old boots, brushes, and greasy soldiers' books; some of them, as it now turned out, had carried a mass of unnecessary articles in their kits all the way to the Danube. Among the discarded junk scattered about on the ground I saw a wooden roller used in peacetime for smoothing out straps and belts before parades and reviews, heavy stone jars that once contained pomade, all kinds of boxes and bits of board, and even a shoemaker's last.

"Throw away everything you can, boys! It will be easier in action. You won't need them tomorrow."

"I've been lugging this about for over five hundred versts, and what do I want it for?" a soldier by the name of Lyutikov said, holding up some old garment. "You can't take it with you."

Kit clearing was the vogue that day. When we left the place on which we had been camping, it represented against the dark setting of the steppe a gaudy rectangle littered with a multitude of rags and other things.

Before setting out, when the regiment stood ready waiting for the command, several officers and our young regimental chaplain gathered at the head. I and four volunteers from other battalions were called out of the ranks; we had all joined the regiment on the line of march. Leaving our rifles to the care of our neighbours, we stepped forward and stood near the colours; my comrades were deeply agitated, and my heart, too, beat faster than usual.

"Take hold of the standard," said the battalion commander. The standard-bearer leaned it forward; his assistants unsheathed it. The old faded green silk fluttered in the wind. We stood round it, one hand holding the staff, the other raised aloft, and repeated the words of the chaplain, who read out from a sheet of paper the ancient Petrine military oath. I recollected what Karpov had said on our first march. "Where was it?" I thought. After a lengthy enumeration of incidents and places where His Majesty had served, listing marches, offensives, vanguards, rearguards, and sentry-guards, forts, and baggage trains, I heard at last the familiar words: "Nor spare life and limb." We all five repeated them loudly as one man, and looking at the ranks of grim-faced men prepared for battle, I felt that those were not mere words.

We returned to the ranks; the regiment stirred and came into motion; strung out in a long column, we set off towards the Danube at a forced march. The sound of shooting that had come from there was no longer to be heard.

I remember that march as if in a dream—the dust raised by the Cossack regiments who overtook us at a fast trot,

the rolling steppe dipping down to the Danube, the opposite bank, which could be seen fifteen versts away; the fatigue, the heat, the scramble at the well, which we came across near Zimnitsa; the dirty little town filled with troops; generals waving their caps to us from balconies and cheering, and our cheering back.

"They've crossed, they've crossed!" voices hummed all around us.

"Two hundred killed, five hundred wounded!"

VIII

It was already dark when we crossed a narrow channel of the Danube by a small bridge and stepped upon a low sandy island still wet from the recent ebb. I remember the clank of the bayonets of soldiers colliding in the dark, the clatter of the artillery racing to overtake us, the black mass of the broad river, the lights on the opposite bank where we had to cross the next day, and thought of the first battle that that day would bring.

"Better not to think of it, and go to sleep," I decided, and lay down in the damp sand.

The sun stood high when I opened my eyes. The sandy bank was crowded with troops, baggage trains, and parks of artillery; gun emplacements and little ditches for the infantry had already been dug at the water's edge; on the steep bluff across the Danube orchards and vineyards could be made out where our troops were bustling about; beyond them rose the heights, which sharply narrowed the horizon. About two miles to the right the white houses and minarets of Sistovo loomed upon the hillsides. A steamboat with a barge in tow ferried battalion after battalion to the other side. At our bank a little torpedo-boat lay hissing.

"Happy landing, Ivanov!" Fyodorov greeted me.

"Same to you. But we haven't crossed yet, have we?"

"The steamboat will soon come and take us. They say a Turkish monitor is hanging about somewhere; see, they've got this little samovar ready for her," he said, pointing to the torpedo-boat. "The number of casualties, my God!" he proceeded in a changed tone. "They've been bringing them over without a stop. . . ."

And he told me the now familiar details of the battle of Sistovo.

"It's our turn now. When we get over there the Turks will let fly at us. At least, we stood off a bit longer: we're still alive, while those fellows. . . ." He nodded towards a group of soldiers and officers a little way off, standing around some invisible object that lay on the ground.

"What is it?"

"Some of our dead brought over from the other side. Go and have a look, it's awful."

I went over to the group. All stood in silence with bared heads, looking at the bodies lying side by side in the sand. Zaikin, Wenzel and Stebelkov were there, too. The captain, with an angry frown, was grunting and puffing; Stebelkov craned his thin neck over the captain's shoulder with a look of naive horror; Wenzel stood deep in thought.

Two bodies lay in the sand. One was that of a strapping handsome guardsman of the Finland Regiment; the half-platoon to which he had belonged had lost half its men during the attack. He had been wounded in the stomach and must have suffered long agony before he died. Suffering had set a delicate seal of something spiritualizing, beautiful, and tenderly wistful upon his face. His eyes were closed, his hands folded on his breast. Had he assumed that pose himself before dying or had his comrades done it for him? He did not inspire horror or revulsion, but merely infinite pity for a life cut off in its full vigour.

Captain Zaikin bent over the dead body, picked up the cap lying next to its head and read the inscription on the inside of the band: "Ivan Zhurenko, Third Platoon."

"He was a Ukrainian, poor devil!" he said softly.

I pictured his native land, a hot wind blowing from the steppe, a village on the edge of a ravine, fenced off meadows with willows growing in them, a white clay cottage with red shutters.... Who is waiting for you there?

The other belonged to a soldier of the Volhynia Regiment. Death had overtaken him suddenly. He had been running forward with the attackers, wild with excitement and breathless from yelling, when a bullet had hit him between the eyes, going through his head and leaving a black gaping wound. He lay just as he had fallen, with dilated, now glazed, eyes, open mouth and a face livid and distorted with fury.

"They've paid off," said Captain Zaikin. "Paid off in full. They need nothing more."

He turned away; the soldiers fell back quickly to make way for him. Stebelkov and I followed him. Wenzel overtook us.

"There, Ivanov," he said. "Did you see that?"

"Yes, Wenzel," I answered.

"What did they remind you of?" he asked gloomily.

A sudden fury against this wicked man flared up in me, together with a desire to tell him something that would hurt.

"Plenty. Most of all that they were no longer cannon-fodder. They have no need now for drilling and discipline, and no one will torment them for the sake of that discipline. They are not soldiers, subordinates any more!" I said in a trembling voice. "They are men!"

Wenzel's eyes flashed. A sound escaped from his throat, then broke off: he had probably wanted to answer me, but had checked himself again. He walked alongside me with head down, then after a while said, without looking at me:

"Yes, Ivanov, you are right. They are men. Dead men."

IX

We were ferried across the Danube; for several days we stood near Sistovo, waiting for the Turks; then the troops started to move inland. We moved, too. For a long time we were kept moving hither and thither; we were at Tirnovo and not far from Plevna; three weeks had passed and we had not seen any fighting. At last we were assigned to a special detachment whose duty it was to stem the offensive of a large group of the Turkish army. Forty thousand Russians were strung out over a distance of seventy versts; facing them were about a hundred thousand Turks, and it was only due to the cautious tactics of our commander, who did not want to risk the lives of his men and contented himself merely with repulsing the enemy's attacks, as well as to the passivity of the Turkish pasha that we were able to fulfil our task of preventing the Turks from breaking through and cutting off our main army from the Danube.

Our numbers were few, and our line a long one; we therefore seldom had a chance to rest. We made the round of numerous villages, appearing now here now there to anticipate an expected attack; we got into such out-of-the-way corners of Bulgaria that the food transports were unable to find us, and we went hungry, making a two-day ration of biscuits last five days and more. The starving men threshed unripe wheat on spread tent sheets with the aid of sticks, and cooked out of this and sour wild apples an execrable soup without salt (because there was none to be had anywhere) and made themselves ill with it. The battalions dwindled although they had not been in action.

In the middle of July our brigade with several cavalry squadrons and two batteries came to a gutted Turkish village abandoned by its inhabitants. We pitched our camp on a steep mountainside; the village was below in the

depth of a valley through which a narrow little river wound its way. Sheer cliffs towered on the other side of the valley. We believed it to be the Turkish side, but there were no Turks anywhere about. We camped on this hill of ours for several days almost without bread and with very little water—we had to go for water far down to a spring gushing from under the cliffs. We were completely cut off from the army and had no idea what was going on in the world. Cossack patrols were posted about fifteen versts in front of us; two or three hundred of them were strung out over twenty versts. There were no Turks there either.

Although we could not discover the enemy our little detachment took every measure of precaution. Day and night we had a dense outpost line around our camp. Owing to the terrain this line was a very long one, and every day several companies were engaged in this inactive but extremely tiresome duty. Inaction, almost constant hunger, and the uncertainty of the situation were having a bad effect on the men.

The regimental field hospitals were filled to overflowing and every day men, exhausted by fever and bloody flux, were forwarded on somewhere to divisional hospital. The companies had only from a half to two-thirds of their full complement. Everyone was gloomy, everyone was eager to go into action. At least it was a way out.

At last it came. A Cossack messenger came galloping in with news from the Cossack patrol commander reporting that the Turks were advancing, and that he had been obliged to draw in his units and fall back five versts. It afterwards transpired that the Turks had drawn back without any intention of continuing the offensive, and that we could have stayed where we were without fear, all the more that we had received no orders to go into attack. But the general who was then in command of our force—he had only recently arrived from St. Petersburg—felt the same way as all his men did. And the men found it in-

sufferable to sit doing nothing or to spend days on end looking out for an invisible and, as everyone believed, non-existent enemy, eating bad food and waiting for one's turn to fall ill. And so the general ordered an attack.

We left half of our detachment in camp. The state of affairs was so uncertain that attacks could be expected from other sides. Fourteen companies, the hussars and four cannons moved out in the afternoon. Never had we marched so briskly and cheerfully, not counting the day we had marched past the Tsar.

We moved through a valley, passing deserted Turkish and Bulgarian villages one after another. In the narrow lanes, which were fenced off by tall wattles higher than a man, we did not meet man, cattle nor dog; the only signs of life were the hens that flew up, clucking, on to the wattle fences and the roofs at our approach, and geese that rose heavily into the air, screeching, and tried to fly away. Branches laden with ripe clustering plums of all varieties peeped out of the little gardens. At the last village, within five versts of where the Turks were supposed to be, we were allowed half an hour's rest. During that time the soldiers shook down a multitude of plums, and filled their bellies and haversacks with them. Some—not many, it is true—went to the trouble of catching and killing hens and geese, which they plucked and took along with them. I thought of how the same soldiers, before the crossing at Sistovo, had thrown all their things out of their packs in expectation of going into battle. I mentioned the fact to Zhitkov, who was plucking a huge goose.

"Ah, well, though we haven't been in action, we've got used to waiting. Seems as if you're just going to keep on staying out of it. And if you do get into the thick of it, there's no harm in having a supply. If you are not killed, a bite of something will come in handy."

"Are you scared?" I could not help asking him.

"Perhaps there won't be anything," he said after a pause, intent on plucking the remaining white down.

"And if there is?"

"If there is, you have to go whether you're frightened or not. They don't ask us fellows. Let's have your knife: it's a fine knife you have." I gave him my big hunting knife. He cut the goose down the middle and offered me a half. "Take it, it may come in handy. As for being scared or not, I wouldn't worry about that if I were you, sir. It's all God's will. There's no getting away from it."

"Especially if it's a bullet flying at you or a shell, say," interposed Fyodorov, who was lying near by. "If you ask me, sir, there's more danger in running away. You see, a bullet flies on a trajectory like this" (he used his finger for illustration), "and those in the rear get it hottest of all!"

"Yes," I said, "especially with the Turks. They say they aim high."

"You know a lot, smart fellow!" Zhitkov said to Fyodorov. "They'll show you trajectories out there! I daresay it's better to be in front, though," he added by afterthought.

"Where our officers are. Ours will be in the lead too," said Fyodorov.

"That they will. They're no cowards. Nemtsev will be in front too."

"What do you say, Uncle Zhitkov," asked Fyodorov, "will he be killed today or not?"

Zhitkov dropped his eyes.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Oh, don't pretend! Didn't you see him? He's all keyed up."

Zhitkov became gloomier still.

"You're talking nonsense," he muttered.

"What did men say before the Danube?" said Fyodorov.

"Before the Danube! Men in a temper will say anything.

Naturally, they're only flesh and blood. But they're not criminals, are they?" Zhitkov said, turning round and looking Fyodorov squarely in the eye. "They're Godfearing people, aren't they? Don't they know what they are in for! Who knows but that they may have to answer to their Maker today. Fancy thinking of such things! Before the Danube! Why, before the Danube I told the gentleman here the same thing myself" (nodding towards me). "It's a fact. It just made you sick to see it. But fancy bringing that up now—'before the Danube'!"

He rummaged in his boot top for his tobacco-pouch, grumbling all the time while he filled his pipe and lit it. Then, putting the pouch away again, he sat back more comfortably with his knees clasped in his hands, and fell to brooding.

Half an hour later we moved out of the village and began to climb uphill, leaving the valley below us. Beyond the height which we had to cross were the Turks. We crested the hill; before us lay a wide undulating stretch of land that gradually fell away; it was covered with wheat fields and maize fields and immense thickets of elms and cornels. In two places the minarets of villages hidden between the green hills stood out whitely. We were to capture the village on the right; beyond it, a pale streak along the skyline, lay the highroad which had previously been occupied by our Cossacks. Presently all this disappeared as we entered a dense thicket broken here and there by open glades.

I hardly remember the beginning of the battle. When we came out into the open on the hill crest, where the Turks could clearly see our companies forming and scattering as they emerged from the undergrowth, a solitary gunshot rang out. The men started; all eyes were fixed on the white puff of spreading smoke that rolled off the hillock. At the same instant the sharp jarring sound of the approaching shell, which seemed to be flying over our very heads,

made us all duck. The shell flew over us and hit the ground near the company that was moving behind us; I remember the dull thud of its explosion, followed immediately by a piteous cry. A sergeant major had had his leg torn off by a splinter. I learned that afterwards; at the moment I could not grasp what that cry meant—my ear had caught it, but not my mind. Everything merged into that vague feeling, hardly to be expressed in words, which grips a man when he first comes under fire. They say there is not a man who is not afraid in battle; every straightforward and honest man, when asked if he was afraid, will answer: yes. It was not that physical fear which seizes a man who meets robbers at night in a dark deserted street; it was a full clear consciousness of the inevitability and proximity of death. And, strange and crazy though it may sound, this knowledge did not stop men, did not make them think of running away, but egged them on. No blood-thirsty instincts were aroused, no desire to go forward in order to kill somebody. There was just an irresistible urge to go forward at all cost, while the thought of what one would have to do during the battle could be expressed in the words: "I have to die," rather than "I have to kill."

While we were crossing the clearing the Turks managed to fire several shots. Between us lay a large thicket which rose gradually to the village. We entered the undergrowth. All was silence.

The going was difficult; the dense, often prickly, bushes had grown thickly, and we had to go round them or through them. The infantrymen in front of us had scattered in a skirmish line and were calling to each other from time to time so as not to lose touch. Our company for the time being kept together. A deep silence reigned in the forest.

And then came the first rifle shot, a quiet sound like the tap of a woodcutter's axe. The Turks began to shoot at random. The bullets whistled high overhead in varying

tones, and spattered through the bushes, tearing off branches, but doing no harm. The tapping of the woodcutter's axe came faster until it merged into a steady crackle; separate screeches and whistlings were no longer distinguishable; the whole air was whistling and whining. We hurried forward; all the men around me, myself included, were unharmed. I was rather surprised.

Suddenly we emerged from the undergrowth. The path dropped away into a deep ravine in which flowed a brook. The men rested for a minute and drank their fill of water.

From here the companies went different ways in order to outflank the Turks; our company was left in reserve in the ravine. The riflemen had to move straight on, and after passing through the undergrowth, attack the village. The Turks still kept up a running fire, but the shooting now was much louder.

Crossing to the other side of the ravine, Wenzel lined his company up. He said something to the men which I could not hear.

"We'll do our best, sir!" voices rose in reply.

I looked up at him; he was pale, and, as I thought, sad, but fairly cool. Catching sight of Zaikin and Stebelkov, he waved his handkerchief to them, then began searching for something with his eyes among our crowd. I guessed that he wanted to say good-bye to me, and I stood so that he could see me. Wenzel smiled, nodded to me several times and commanded his company to join the skirmish line. They scattered right and left in groups of four, strung out in a long line, and immediately disappeared in the bushes—all except one man, who suddenly bounded forward, threw his arms up and collapsed. Two of our men dashed out of the ravine and brought the body in.

Half an hour dragged by in an agony of suspense.

The fighting grew heavier. The rifle fire had now merged into a continuous deadly whine. Guns spoke up on the right flank. Bleeding men, walking and crawling, began

to appear out of the undergrowth; at first there were few of them, but their numbers increased with every minute. Our men helped them down the side of the ravine, gave them water and made them as comfortable as they could until the stretcher-bearers arrived. A soldier with a shattered wrist and a face blue from loss of blood and pain, came down himself and sat by the brook, groaning dreadfully and rolling up his eyes. The men bound his arm up and laid him down on a greatcoat; the bleeding stopped. He was feverish; his lips quivered and convulsive sobs shook his body.

"My God, brothers! My God!"

"Many killed?"

"Masses of 'em, all over the place—it's terrible."

"Is the company commander alive?"

"Yes. If not for him they'd have beaten us off. But with him they'll do it," the wounded man said in a faint voice. "He led us three times; every time we were beaten back. He led us again. They're sitting in a gully, raking us with bullets, simply raking.... No fear!" the wounded man suddenly shouted fiercely, getting up and waving his bad arm. "No you won't, damn you!"

He rolled his eyes in a frenzy, shouted out a coarse terrible oath, then fainted away.

Lukin appeared on the brow of the ravine.

"Captain Zaikin!" he yelled in a voice not like his own. "Lead your men forward!"

. . . . . .

Smoke, a din, groans, wild cheers. The smell of blood and gunpowder. Strange-looking men with white faces shrouded in smoke. A savage inhuman scramble. Thank God such moments are but dimly recollected, as if through a haze.

. . . . . .

When we came up Wenzel was leading his company against the Turks for the fifth time under a deadly hail

of lead. This time the infantry broke into the village. Few of the Turks who had been defending it at this point succeeded in escaping. The 2nd Rifle Company had lost *fifty-two* men out of a hundred odd in two hours of fighting. Our company, which had not been in action long, lost several men.

We did not stay at the captured positions, although the Turks had been dislodged everywhere. When our general saw battalion after battalion of them moving out of the village, together with masses of cavalry and long lines of guns, he stood aghast. Evidently the Turks had not been aware of our numbers, for we had been hidden in the undergrowth; had they known that they had been driven out of the rutted roads, gullies and wattle fences surrounding the village by only fourteen companies, they would have come back and crushed us. They had thrice our numbers.

In the evening we were back at our old place. Captain Zaikin invited me to tea.

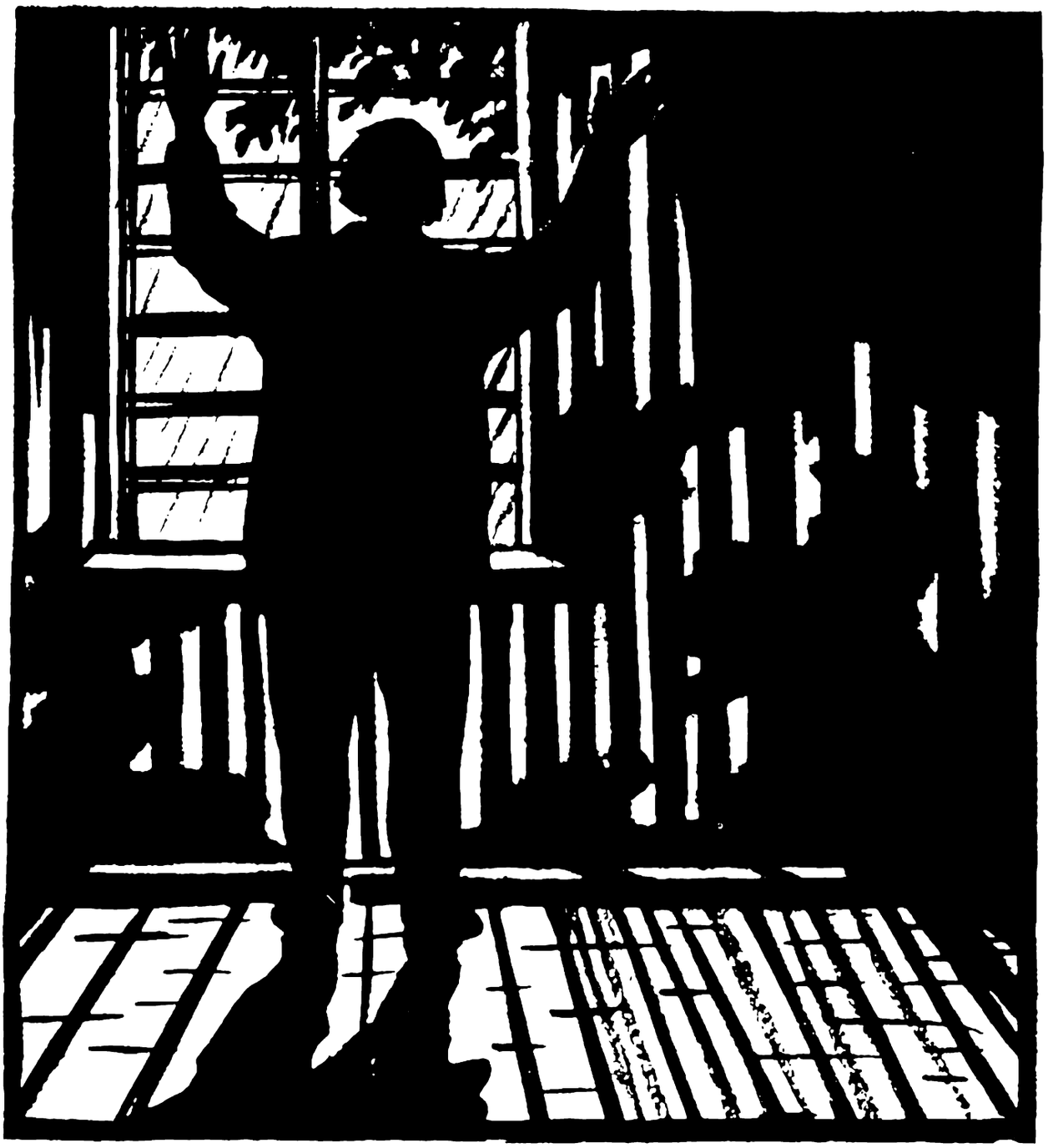
"Have you seen Wenzel?" he asked me.

"Not yet."

"Go to his tent and call him to join us. The man is taking on something dreadful. 'Fifty-two! Fifty-two!' he keeps on repeating. Go and fetch him."

A thin bit of candle feebly lit up Wenzel's tent. He was crouching there in a corner, his head on a box and his body shaken by deep smothered sobs.

1882



THE SCARLET FLOWER

(To the Memory of I. Turgenev)

I

In the name of his Royal Majesty and Sovereign Monarch King Peter the First I do declare this madhouse open for inspection!"

This speech was uttered in a loud raucous voice. The hospital clerk, who was registering the patient in a big

dog-eared book that lay on an ink-stained desk, could not help smiling. But the two young attendants did not laugh: after two days and sleepless nights spent alone with the madman, whom they had just brought down by railway, they could barely stand on their feet. At the last station but one he had become so violent that he had had to be put in a strait jacket, for which purpose the assistance of the guards and a policeman had had to be resorted to. Thus bound he was brought to town and delivered at the hospital.

He looked ghastly. Over his grey garment, which had been torn to shreds during his outburst of violence, was a tightly laced jacket of coarse canvas cut low at the neck; the long sleeves pinioned his crossed arms over his chest and were tied behind his back. His bloodshot dilated eyes (he had not slept for ten days) glittered with a feverish blazing light; his lower lip twitched with a nervous spasm; his curly matted hair hung over his forehead like a mane; he paced from corner to corner of the office with swift heavy strides, staring fixedly at the old file cabinets and the oilcloth-covered chairs, and throwing an occasional glance at his companions.

"Take him in. The building on the right."

"I know. I was here last year. We were inspecting the hospital. I know all about it, it will be difficult to deceive me," said the patient.

He turned towards the door. The door-keeper opened it to let him pass through; he walked out of the office with the same swift, heavy, resolute stride, his demented head held high, and made for the mental department on the right almost at a run. His attendants were barely able to keep up with him.

"Ring the bell. I can't do it, you have tied my hands."

The door-keeper opened the door, and the patient and his attendants entered the hospital.

It was a large stone building of old-fashioned construc-

tion. Two large halls—one a dining-room, the other a common room for the quiet inmates—a wide passage with a glass door leading into the garden, and about twenty separate rooms where the inmates lived, occupied the ground floor; on the same floor were two dark rooms, one padded, the other boarded, where the violent patients were kept, and a great gloomy room with a vaulted ceiling which was the bath-room. The upper floor was occupied by the women. A confused hum, punctuated by howls and screeches, came from there. The hospital had been built for eighty patients, but as it was the only one serving several adjacent gubernias, it accommodated up to three hundred. The tiny rooms contained as many as four and five beds; in the winter, when the patients were not allowed out into the garden, and all the windows behind their iron bars were shut tight, the air in the hospital became unbearably stuffy.

The new patient was led into the room containing the baths. This room was a depressing sight even to a sane man, and all the more painful was it to a sick disordered mind. It was a large vaulted room with a sticky stone floor illumined by a single corner window; the walls and arches were painted with dark-red oil paint; two built-in stone baths, like two oval holes filled with water, were sunk into the ground on a level with the floor, which was black with dirt. A huge copper stove with a cylindrical boiler for heating the water and a maze of copper pipes and taps occupied a corner facing the window; all this to a sick brain had a sinister fantastic appearance, and the bath attendant himself, a burly, dour-faced, taciturn Ukrainian, only tended to heighten this impression.

When the patient was taken into this sinister room to have his bath, and, in accordance with the system of treatment introduced by the house physician, to have a large blister plaster put on the back of his neck, he was beside himself with terror and fury. Ridiculous thoughts, one more monstrous than the other, whirled in his brain. What was

this? The Inquisition? A secret place of execution where his enemies had decided to do away with him? Or was this Hell itself? It then occurred to him that this was a kind of ordeal. He was undressed despite his desperate resistance. With an energy redoubled by sickness he easily wrenched himself out of the hands of the attendants, who fell sprawling on the floor; finally the four of them threw him down, and seizing him by the arms and legs, lowered him into the warm water. It seemed boiling hot to him, and wild crazy thoughts of ordeal by boiling water and red-hot iron thronged his sick head. Choking with water, struggling furiously in the grip of the attendants, he shouted out in a half-strangled voice an incoherent speech, the nature of which one cannot possibly imagine unless one has actually heard it. It was a mixture of prayers and curses. He screamed and fought until he was utterly exhausted, and then quietly, with hot tears pouring down his face, he uttered a phrase that was oddly at variance with his previous speech.

"Holy martyr St. George! Into thy hands I give my body. But my soul—no, oh no!"

The attendants were still holding him, although he had calmed down. The warm bath and the ice bag applied to his head had done their work. But when, almost senseless, he was taken out of the water and seated on a stool to have a blister plaster applied, he mustered his last ounce of strength and his crazed brain in a fresh outburst.

"What have I done?" he shrieked. "I was doing no one any harm. Why do you want to kill me? O-o-o! Oh, my God! Oh, the souls of all those tortured before me! Deliver me, I pray. . . ."

The burning touch of the plaster to the nape of his neck made him struggle furiously. The attendants could not manage him and did not know what to do.

"It cannot be helped," said the soldier who was performing the operation, "it will have to be rubbed off."

These simple words, misconstrued by the sick man as "rubbed out," made him shudder. "Rubbed out? Rub what out? Rub who out? Me?" he thought, and shut his eyes in deadly terror. The soldier took a rough towel by its two ends and rubbed it hard across the back of the man's neck, tearing off the blister plaster and leaving a livid patch where the skin had come away with it. The pain of that operation, unbearable even to a calm and sane person, seemed the end of everything to the patient. He wrenched himself free with a frantic effort, and his naked body went rolling over the flagstones. He thought he had had his head cut off. He wanted to cry out but he could not. He was carried senseless to his bed, where, without coming to, he fell into a deep dead sleep.

II

He awoke in the night. All was quiet; in the large room next door one could hear the breathing of the sleeping patients. Somewhere far away an inmate of the dark padded room was talking to himself in a strange monotonous voice, while upstairs, in the women's department, a hoarse contralto was singing a wild song. The sick man lay listening to these sounds. He felt terribly weak in all his aching limbs, and his neck was causing him great pain.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he wondered. And suddenly the last month of his life came back to him with extraordinary vividness, and he realized that he was ill and what his illness was. He recalled various crazy thoughts, words, and actions of his, and a shudder ran through his body.

"That is over now. Thank God, that is all over!" he whispered, and fell asleep again.

The iron-barred open window gave upon a small area between the big buildings and the stone fence; no one ever used that area, and it was covered with a rank growth

of wild shrubs and lilac bushes, which were in full blossom at that time of the year. On the other side of the shrubbery directly facing the window rose a high dark wall, from behind which peeped the tops of the trees growing in the large garden, all bathed and steeped in moonlight. On the right rose the white building of the hospital, its barred windows lighted up from within; on the left was the blank wall of the mortuary, dazzling white under the moon. The moonlight poured into the room through the barred window and lit up part of the bed and the gaunt pallid face of the sick man with closed eyes; there was not a trace of madness in it now. It was the deep heavy sleep of an exhausted man, a sleep without dreams, without the slightest movement, almost without breathing. He awoke for several seconds perfectly sane and seemingly healthy, only to get up in the morning as insane as ever.

III

"How do you feel?" the doctor asked him the next day.

The patient, who had just woken up, still lay under his blanket.

"Splendid!" he answered, jumping up, putting on his slippers and snatching his dressing-gown. "Splendid! The only trouble is this!" And he pointed to the back of his head. "I cannot turn my head, it hurts me. But that is nothing. Everything is good when you understand it; and I understand."

"Do you know where you are?"

"Of course I do, doctor! In a madhouse. But once you understand it makes no difference. No earthly difference."

The doctor looked into his eyes searchingly. His smooth handsome face with its perfectly groomed golden beard and steady blue eyes behind a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles was inscrutable and observant.

"What are you staring at me for? You will not be able to read my soul," the patient continued, "but I can clearly

see into yours! Why are you doing evil? Why have you herded together all these unfortunate people, why do you keep them here? I don't care: I understand what it's all about and so I take it calmly; but they? Why these tortures? To a man who has had a great idea, a common idea, brought home to him, it makes no difference where he lives, what he feels. He does not even care whether he lives or not. . . . Isn't that so?"

"Possibly," the doctor answered, sitting down on a chair in a corner of the room the better to be able to watch the patient, who was pacing swiftly from corner to corner in his huge shuffling horse-hide slippers and his fluttering cotton gown with broad crimson stripes and large flowers. The medical assistant and the attendant accompanying the doctor continued to stand at attention by the door.

"And I have it!" the patient cried. "When I discovered it I felt myself a new man. My senses were sharpened, and my brain functions as never before. What I used to arrive at by a long process of guess-work and inference, I now realize intuitively. I have attained in reality what philosophy has evolved in theory. I experience through myself the great ideas that space and time are but a fiction. I dwell in all the ages. I live beyond space, everywhere or nowhere, as you like. And therefore I do not care whether you keep me here or let me go, whether I am free or bound. I notice that there are one or two more like me here. But for the rest of the crowd such a situation is terrible. Why don't you set them free? Who wants--"

"You said," the doctor interrupted him, "that you live beyond space and time. But surely you will agree with me that you and I are both in this room, and that it is now"- the doctor consulted his watch-"half past ten on May the sixth, eighteen hundred and--. What do you say to that?"

"Nothing. I do not care where I am and when I live. If I do not care, does not that signify that I am everywhere and always?"

The doctor smiled.

"Sound logic," he said. "I daresay you are right. Good day. Would you care for a cigar?"

"Thank you." He stopped, took a cigar, and bit off the tip with nervous impatience. "It helps you to think," he said. "This world is a microcosm. At one end—alkalis, at the other—acids. . . . Such is the equilibrium of the world in which opposite bases are neutralized. Good-bye, doctor!"

The doctor proceeded on his round. Many of the patients stood stiffly at their cots, waiting for him. No chief enjoys such respect from his subordinates as a psychiatrist does from his insane patients.

The sick man, left alone, continued to pace feverishly from corner to corner. Tea was brought him; without sitting down, he emptied the large cup in two gulps, and ate up the chunk of white bread in the twinkling of an eye. Then he went out, and for several hours in succession, without stopping, he walked from one end of the building to the other with his swift heavy stride. It was a rainy day and the inmates were not allowed out into the garden. When the doctor's assistant looked for the new patient, someone pointed him out at the end of the passage; he was standing there with his face pressed against the glass pane of the garden door, staring at the flower-bed. His attention was attracted by an unusually vivid scarlet flower, a variety of the poppy.

"Please come and be weighed," the doctor's assistant said, touching his shoulder.

When the patient turned his face to him, he recoiled with a stab of fear—such a look of maniacal malignity and hatred was reflected in the patient's blazing eyes. At the sight of the doctor's assistant, however, he instantly changed his expression and followed him meekly without uttering a word, as though sunk deep in thought. They went into the consulting-room; the patient stepped on to the platform of the small decimal balance without waiting

to be invited; the doctor's assistant checked his weight, and wrote "109 pounds" against his name in the book. The next day it was 107, and the day after that 106.

"If he keeps on like this he will not last long," the doctor said, and gave orders for him to be fed well.

But despite the doctor's orders and the patient's prodigious appetite, the latter lost weight day by day, and the figure which the assistant wrote down in the book dwindled steadily. The patient hardly slept and spent whole days in ceaseless movement.

IV

He realized that he was in a madhouse; he even realized that he was ill. Sometimes, as on that first night, he would wake up in the stillness of the night after a whole day of violent movement, aching in all his limbs, and with a weight of lead in his head, but otherwise perfectly sane. It may have been the absence of impressions induced by the still night and the semi-darkness, or the sluggish work of a brain roused from sleep that made him clearly realize his position at such moments with what seemed to be perfect sanity. Then, with daybreak, the hospital came to life, and a wave of impressions engulfed him; his sick brain could not cope with them, and he succumbed again. His condition was a peculiar mixture of sane reasoning and nonsense. He understood that all these people around him were hospital patients, yet he saw in every one of them some incognito or secretly disguised person whom he had known before, or about whom he had heard or read. The hospital was tenanted by people of all ages and all countries, dead and living. Here, resurrected, were the famous and the strong of all the world, and soldiers killed in the last war. He saw himself in a kind of enchanted circle in which was gathered all the might of the earth, and in a frenzy of pride, believed himself to be the centre of that circle. All his hospital mates had gathered here with him

to fulfil a task which he vaguely envisaged as a gigantic enterprise aimed at destroying the evil of the world. He did not know what form it would take, but he felt that he had it in him to carry it out. He could read people's minds; things revealed to him their whole history; the great elms in the hospital garden told him legends of the past; the building, which was really fairly old, he considered to have been erected under Peter the Great, and was convinced that the Tsar had lived in it at the time of the Poltava Battle. He read this on the walls, on pieces of chipped off plaster, on the fragments of bricks and tiles that he found in the garden; the whole history of this house and its garden was written on them. He peopled the small building of the mortuary with scores and hundreds of individuals long since dead, and he stared through its little basement window, seeing in the shadowy light reflected in the old, iridescent and dirty glass the familiar lineaments which he had once seen in life or on portraits.

Meanwhile the weather had turned fine and sunny, and the inmates spent all day in the garden. Their part of the garden was a small space, thickly overgrown with trees, which had flowers planted over it wherever possible. The warden made everyone work in it who was at all fit to do anything; day in day out the patients pottered about sweeping the paths, strewing sand on them, weeding and watering the flower-beds, the cucumbers, melons and water-melons, which they had planted with their own hands. The corner of the garden was overgrown with cherry-trees; avenues of elm-trees ran down it; in the middle, on a small artificial mound, a flower-bed had been laid out, the most beautiful flower-bed in the whole garden; bright flowers grew round the borders of the upper ledge, while the centre was adorned by a gorgeous yellow dahlia with red spots. It was the centre piece of the whole garden, which it dominated, and it was to be observed that many of the inmates attached a kind of mysterious significance to it. It

struck the new patient, too, as being rather remarkable, a palladium of the garden and building, as it were. All the garden walks, too, had been planted by the inmates with all kinds of flowers such as are usually met with in Ukrainian homes: tall roses, brilliant petunias, clumps of tall tobacco plants with small pink blossoms, mint, marigolds, nasturtiums, and poppies. Right near the doorstep grew three clusters of poppies of some peculiar variety; they were much smaller than the ordinary poppy, from which they were distinguished, however, by their extraordinarily brilliant scarlet hue. It was this flower that had arrested the patient's attention on his first day at the hospital, when he had been found looking out into the garden through the glass door.

On coming out into the garden, the first thing he had done before descending the steps was to look at those brilliant flowers. There were only two of them, growing somewhat apart from the rest on an unweeded spot, half-buried in rank goose-foot and dock.

The inmates came through the door one by one, and the door-keeper gave each of them a thick, white knitted cap with a red cross on the front of it. These caps had been in the war and had been purchased by auction. But the patient, naturally, attached a special mysterious significance to that red cross. He took his cap off and looked at the cross, then at the poppies. The flowers were brighter.

"He is winning," said the patient, "but we shall see."

And he descended the steps. Looking round and not seeing the attendant, who was standing behind him, he stepped over the flower-bed and stretched his hand out towards the flower, but could not bring himself to pluck it. He felt a hot stab of pain in his outstretched arm, and then throughout his body, as though some powerful secret current emanating from the scarlet petals had shot through his body. He went closer, his hand almost touching the flower, but it seemed to him as if the flower was defending

itself, exhaling a poisonous deadly breath. His head reeled; making a last desperate effort, he seized it by its stem when suddenly a heavy hand dropped on his shoulder. The attendant had caught him.

"You must not pick the flowers," the old man said. "And you should not walk on the flower-beds. There are a lot of you lunatics here; if every one took a flower there would be nothing left of the garden," he pointed out persuasively, his hand still on the patient's shoulder.

The patient looked him in the face, removed his hand in silence, and walked away down the garden path deeply perturbed. "Poor wretches!" he thought. "You see nothing, you are so blind that you defend it. But come what may, I shall put an end to it. Soon now we shall cross swords. And if I die in the attempt, what does it matter. . . ."

He walked about the garden till late in the evening, striking up acquaintances and starting strange conversations in which each of his interlocutors found only the answers to his own crazy thoughts expressed in absurd mysterious words. The patient walked about first with one companion, then another, and towards the end of the day he was more convinced than ever that "all was ready," as he put it to himself. Soon now, soon, the iron bars would fall apart, and all the people imprisoned here would be set free and rush to all corners of the earth, and the world, with a shudder, would throw off its shabby old covering and appear in all its glorious and shining new beauty. He had almost forgotten about the flower until he mounted the steps on his way out of the garden, when he saw the two red coals glowing amid the dense, darkened and already dewy grass. The patient lagged behind the crowd, and when the door-keeper's back was turned, he jumped over the flower-bed, snatched the flower and hid it away hastily under his shirt. When the fresh dewy leaves touched his body he grew as pale as death, and his eyes dilated in terror. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

The lamps were lit in the hospital; while waiting for their supper most of the inmates lay down on their beds, and only a few restless souls hurriedly paced the passage and the halls. Among them was the patient with the flower. He walked about with his clasped hands convulsively crossed on his chest as if he would crush and destroy the plant that lay hidden there. He gave everyone he met a wide berth, taking care not to touch them with the hem of his garment. "Keep away, keep away!" he shouted. But such exclamations in the hospital hardly attracted attention. He walked faster and faster, making longer and longer strides; he walked for an hour, two hours, in a kind of frenzy.

"I'll wear you out! I'll strangle you!" he muttered savagely.

At times he gnashed his teeth.

Supper was served in the dining-room. Several painted and gilt wooden bowls containing a thin millet gruel were set out on large bare tables; the patients took their seats on the benches; they were each given a lump of black bread. They ate with wooden spoons, eight men out of one bowl. Some of them—those who were on an improved diet—were served separately. Our patient quickly swallowed his portion, which the attendant had brought him in his room, and not satisfied with this, he went into the common dining-room.

"May I sit here?" he asked the warden.

"Haven't you had your supper yet?" the latter asked as he dished out extra portions of porridge.

"I am very hungry. Besides, I have to keep my strength up. Food is my only support; I don't sleep at all, you know."

"My dear man, you're welcome to it. Taras, give him a spoon and some bread."

He sat down before one of the common bowls and ate a vast quantity of porridge.

"That'll do, now, that'll do," the warden said at length, when all had finished supper while our patient was still sitting over his bowl, eating out of it with one hand, while the other he held clutched to his breast. "You'll overeat yourself."

"Ah, if you only knew what a lot of strength I need! Good-bye, Nikolai Nikolayevich," the patient said, getting up from the table and wringing the warden's hand. "Farewell."

"Where are you off to?" the warden said with a smile.

"I? Nowhere. I am staying here. But tomorrow, perhaps, we shall see each other no more. Thank you for all your kindness."

And he gripped the warden's hand once more. His voice shook and there were tears in his eyes.

"Now, don't upset yourself, my dear," said the warden. "Why these gloomy thoughts? Go and lie down and have a good sleep. You ought to sleep more; if you sleep well, you'll get well quickly."

The patient was sobbing. The warden turned away and told the attendants to hurry up and clear the table. Within half an hour everyone in the hospital was asleep—all except one man, who lay fully dressed on his bed in the corner room. He was shivering as if with the fever, clutching convulsively at his breast, which, so it seemed to him, was impregnated with a dread and deadly poison.

V

He did not sleep all night. He had plucked that flower because he regarded the act as a deed of valour which he was obliged to perform. The scarlet petals had attracted his attention the moment he had looked through the glass door, and it seemed to him that it was from that very moment that he had come at last to realize what his task

was in this world. All the world's evil was concentrated in that brilliant scarlet flower. He knew that opium was obtained from the poppy; it was perhaps this thought, magnified in his mind to grotesque dimensions, that had made him create that grim fantastic spectre. The flower was to him the embodiment of all evil; it had soaked up all the innocently spilt blood (that was why it was so red), all the tears, and all the anguish of humanity. It was a mysterious, sinister creature, the opposite of God, Ahriman in a modest innocent guise. It had to be torn out and slain. More, it had to be prevented, in dying, from spreading its evil through the world. And that is why he had concealed it in his bosom. He hoped that by the morning the flower would have lost all its malign power. The evil that was in it would pass into his breast, his soul, and there it would either be conquered or would conquer—and then he himself would perish, die, but he would die an honest fighter, the first fighter of mankind, because no one up till then had dared single-handed to grapple with all the evil of the world.

"They have not seen it. I have. How can I let it live? Better death."

And he lay fainting, exhausted by the unreal shadowy struggle that he was waging. In the morning the doctor's assistant found him almost half-dead. Nevertheless, excitation presently got the upper hand; he sprang from his bed and began to run about the hospital again, talking to the patients and to himself louder and more wildly than ever. He was not allowed to go out into the garden. Seeing that he was losing weight, not sleeping, and walking about all the time, the doctor ordered him an injection of a large dose of morphium. He offered no resistance: fortunately, his crazy thoughts at the time happened to fit in with this operation. He soon fell asleep; the frenzied movement ceased, and the loud maddening tune produced by the time-beat of his quick nervous steps died out of his ears. He

dropped off and no longer thought of anything, not even of the second flower that remained to be plucked.

He plucked it three days later under the eye of the old door-keeper and before the latter could prevent him. The door-keeper ran after him. The patient ran into the hospital with a triumphant yell and dashed into his room where he hid the flower in his bosom.

"Why do you pluck the flowers?" demanded the door-keeper, running in after him. But the patient, who was now lying on his bed with his arms folded on his chest in his customary pose, began to talk such nonsense that the door-keeper, saying nothing more, took off his head the cap with the red cross which he had forgotten in his precipitate flight, and went away. And the phantom struggle began again. The sick man felt the evil gushing from the flower in long, wriggling, snake-like jets; they wrapped themselves around him, squeezed and crushed his limbs, sunk their deadly venom into him. Between curses directed against his enemy he wept and prayed to God. By the evening the flower had withered. The sick man trampled on the blackened plant, picked the remnants of it up from the floor and carried them into the bath-room. He threw the squashed shapeless scraps on to the blazing coals of the stove, and stood for a long time watching his enemy hiss and shrivel until he had turned at last into a soft little heap of snow-white ashes. He blew at it, and it all disappeared.

The next day the patient was worse. Deathly pale and haggard, with glittering eyes sunk deep in their sockets, he continued his violent pacing with a reeling stumbling gait and talked and talked without a stop.

"I should not like to resort to force," the head physician told his assistant. "But this activity must be stopped. Today his weight is ninety-three pounds. At this rate he won't last more than two days."

The physician became lost in thought.

"Morphine? Chloral?" he said half-questioningly.

"The morphine didn't work yesterday."

"Have him bound. I doubt, though, whether he will survive."

VI

The patient was bound. He lay on his bed in a strait jacket, tightly strapped down to the iron cross-pieces of the bedstead with broad strips of canvas. But the furious activity, if anything, increased rather than abated. He struggled hard for hours to free himself from his fetters. At last, with a violent wrench, he tore one of the bands, and freed his leg, then, slipping out from under the rest, began to pace the room with arms bound, shouting out wild unintelligible speeches.

"Daze my eyes!" cried the door-keeper coming in. "The devils must ha' been helping you! Gritsko! Ivan! Quick, he's got loose."

The three of them fell upon the patient, and there began a long struggle, a tiring one for the attackers, and an agonizing one for the attacked, who spent the last of his exhausted strength. At last he was overcome, and bound down to his bed more securely than ever.

"You don't understand what you are doing!" the sick man panted. "You are perishing! I saw a third, just beginning to blossom. It's ready now. Let me finish my work! I have to kill it! Kill it! Then it will all be over, everything will be saved. I would send you, but this is a thing I can only do myself. You would die from the mere touch."

"Keep quiet, sir!" said the old door-keeper, who was left to watch at his bedside.

The patient suddenly fell silent. He had decided to trick his keepers. He was kept tied down all day and left in that position for the night. After giving him his supper, the caretaker made his bed on the floor near the patient's cot

and lay down. In a minute he was fast asleep, and the patient fell to work again.

He twisted his whole body over to reach the iron bar that ran lengthwise down the bedstead, and feeling for it with his wrist, which was concealed in the long sleeve of the strait jacket, he began to rub the sleeve hard against the iron bar. In due course the thick canvas gave way and he freed his forefinger. After that things went faster. With a dexterity and suppleness that would have been incredible in a healthy man, he untied the knot behind his back which pinioned the sleeves, and unlaced the jacket, after which he sat for a long time listening to the snores of the caretaker. But the old man slept soundly. The patient took off the strait jacket and untied the bands that strapped him to the bed. He was now free. He tried the door; it was locked from the inside, and the key, no doubt, lay in the caretaker's pocket. He did not dare to search his pockets for fear of wakening him, so he decided to go out through the window.

The night was still, warm, and dark; the window was open; stars shone in the black sky. He looked at them, distinguishing familiar constellations and feeling glad that they seemed to understand him and sympathize with him. Narrowing his eyes, he saw the endless rays which they sent him, and his mad resolve was strengthened. The thing was to bend aside one of the thick rods on the barred window, crawl through the narrow opening into the area, and climb over the high stone wall. There he would fight his last battle, and after that—death might come for all he cared.

He tried to bend the thick bar with his bare hands, but the iron refused to yield. Then he twisted the strong sleeves of the strait jacket into a rope, hitched it to the spearhead hammered out at the bottom of the bar, and threw his whole weight upon it. After desperate efforts, which almost exhausted his last remaining strength, the rod bent, offering a narrow opening. He squeezed himself

through it, grazing the skin of his shoulders, elbows and knees, crept through the bushes and stopped before the wall. All was quiet. The windows of the great building were dimly lit up by the night lamps. There was not a soul about. No one had noticed him; the old man set to watch at his bedside was probably fast asleep. The stars twinkled kindly and their rays went straight to his heart.

"I am coming," he whispered, gazing at the sky.

At his first attempt he lost his footing, and with broken finger-nails and bleeding hands and knees, he began to seek a more convenient spot. At a point where the garden wall joined the wall of the mortuary several bricks were missing. The patient found these holes in the wall and used them for a foothold. He climbed up the wall, seized the branch of an elm growing on the other side, and quietly lowered himself to the ground by means of the tree trunk.

He rushed to the familiar spot near the doorstep. The flower, a dark little patch with folded petals, stood out clearly in the dewy grass.

"The last!" whispered the patient. "The last! Today victory or death. But that does not matter any more. Wait," he said, looking up at the sky, "I shall be with you soon."

He pulled out the plant, crushed it, squashed it, and clutching it in his hand, returned to his room the way he had come. The old man was sleeping. The patient dropped senseless on his bed the moment he reached it.

In the morning he was found dead. His face was calm and serene; the emaciated features with the thin lips and closed sunken eyes expressed a kind of proud elation. When he was placed on the stretcher they tried to unclench his hand to take the crimson flower out, but his hand had stiffened in death, and he carried his trophy away with him to the grave.

1883

THE TALE OF THE TOAD AND THE ROSE

Once there lived a rose and a toad.

The bush on which the rose blossomed grew in a small semicircular garden in front of a country cottage. The garden was sadly neglected; rank weeds grew over the old sunken flower-beds and the garden walks, and it was long since anyone had swept them

or sprinkled sand over them. The wooden fence with railings fashioned in the shape of spikelets, which had once been painted green, had cracked and crumbled, and the paint had all peeled off; the railings had been pulled out by the village boys to play soldiers with, and by peasants coming to the house, who used them to fight off the angry mongrel and the other dogs who kept him company.

But the flower-garden was none the worse for this damage. The remains of the fence were entwined with hops, large white-flowered bindweed and mouse-ear chickweed, which hung upon them in pale-green clusters of pale-lilac flowers scattered here and there. The prickly thistles grew to such a size on the rich moist soil (all around the flower-garden was a large shady orchard) that they looked almost like trees. The yellow moth mulleins reared their flowery spikes still higher. The nettles occupied a pretty large corner of the flower-garden; they stung, of course, but then one could admire their dark foliage from a distance, especially when it made a background for the pale beauty of the delicate rose petals.

The rose blossomed one fine May morning; when it opened out its petals the fleeing morning dew left several bright teardrops upon them. It seemed as if the rose was weeping. But the world around her was so beautiful, so clear and sunny on that lovely morning when first she saw the blue sky, and felt the fresh morning breeze, and the beams of the radiant sun shone through her delicate petals with a rosy light; and it was so quiet and peaceful in the flower-garden, that if she could have wept, she would have done so, not through sadness but through the sheer joy of living. She could not speak; all she could do was to nod her dainty head and spread around her a delicate fragrance, and in that fragrance was her speech, her tears, and her prayer.

Meanwhile, between the roots of the bush on the damp ground below—as if clinging to it on his flat stomach—sat

a fairly fat old toad, who, after having hunted worms and midges all night, had sat down towards the morning to rest from his labours, choosing for the purpose a nice damp and shady spot. He sat with hooded eyes and you could hardly tell that he was breathing; his dingy-grey, warty, sticky sides worked like bellows, and one ugly webbed foot stuck out on one side—he was too lazy to draw it in under his belly. He found no pleasure in the morning, the sunshine or the fine weather; he had eaten his fill and was going to have a nap.

But when the breeze dropped for a moment and the scent of the rose was not wafted away, the toad smelt it, and felt vaguely uneasy. For a long time, however, he was too lazy to look where the smell came from.

It was long since anyone had visited the flower-garden where the rose grew and the toad sat. It had been in the autumn of the previous year, just on the day when the toad had found a nice hole for himself under one of the stones of the house's foundation and was about to crawl in there for his long winter sleep, that the little boy, who had been sitting in the garden every sunny day all through the summer, had last been there. He had sat under the window, while his sister, a grown-up girl, had sat next to him reading a book or doing some sewing, and glancing occasionally at her brother. He was a little boy of seven with big eyes and a large head on a thin body. He was very fond of his flower-garden (it was his because hardly anyone else ever went into that desolate spot), and when he came there he would sit down in the sun on an old wooden bench, standing in a dry sandy path right near the house—the path had survived because it was used for reaching the shutters when they had to be closed—and would start reading a book which he had brought with him.

"Would you like me to throw you the ball, Vasya?" his sister had asked him from the window. "Don't you want to run about and play with it?"

"No, Masha, I'd rather sit with a book."

And he would sit there for a long time, reading. When he got tired of reading about Robinson Crusoes, and savage lands, and sea pirates, he would leave the open book and make his way into the heart of the flower-garden. Here he knew every bush and almost every stalk. He squatted down in front of the thick stem of the moth mullein, which was surrounded with hairy whitish leaves, and was twice as tall as he, and watched the little ant people running up it to milk their cows—the plant lice; the ant would delicately touch the thin little tubes sticking up on their backs and collect the tiny drops of sweet clear fluid that appeared at the ends of the tubes. He watched the dung-beetle busily struggling along with his ball, the spider spreading his cunning rainbow-hued net and lying in wait for a fly, and the flat-nosed lizard basking in the sun with open mouth, the green corselets on its back gleaming; and once, towards the evening, he had seen a real live hedgehog! He had scarcely been able to contain himself from crying out and clapping his hands for sheer joy; afraid to scare the prickly little beast, he had sat there holding his breath, his happy eyes wide and shining, gazing rapturously at it as it snorted and sniffed at the roots of the rose bush with its little pig's snout, looking for worms, and working its fat bear-like little paws in a funny way.

"Vasya, you'd better come in, darling, it's getting damp," his sister had called.

Frightened by the human voice, the hedgehog had quickly drawn his coat of quills over his head and hind paws and rolled himself up into a ball. The boy touched the spines gingerly; the little beast had shrunk smaller and started puffing rapidly like a little steam-engine.

Afterwards he had improved his acquaintance with that hedgehog. He was such a frail, quiet, gentle little boy that even the smallest of creatures seemed to understand it and

took to him quickly. How glad he was when the hedgehog tasted the milk which the master of the garden had brought him in a saucer!

This spring the boy was unable to come out to his favourite spot. His sister still sat by him, this time not at the window, but at his bedside; she was reading a book, but not for herself; she was reading it out loud to him, because it was hard for him to lift his head from the white pillows, hard for him to hold even the smallest of books in his wasted hands, not to mention that his eyes quickly grew tired from reading. It looked as if he would never go out to his favourite spot any more.

"Masha!" he suddenly whispered to his sister.

"Yes, darling?"

"It's nice in the garden now, isn't it? Have the roses blossomed?"

His sister leaned over and kissed his pale cheek, furtively wiping away a tear.

"It is nice, dear, very nice. And the roses have blossomed too. We shall go out there together on Monday. The doctor will allow you to go out."

The boy did not answer, and drew a deep sigh. His sister began reading to him again.

"That will do. I am tired. I want to sleep."

His sister straightened his pillows and the white coverlet, and he turned over with difficulty towards the wall. The sun shone through the window, which looked out on the flower-garden, and threw its bright beams upon the bed and the little figure that lay on it, lighting up the pillows and the coverlet and gilding the short-cut hair and thin neck of the child.

The rose knew nothing of this; she grew there outside in all her splendour; the next day she was to open out in full blossom, and the day after that she would begin to fade and shed her petals. That was all a rose's span! But short though it was, it had its full measure of fear and sorrow.

The toad had seen her.

When he saw the flower for the first time with his wicked ugly eyes, something strange stirred within him. He could not tear himself away from the tender pink petals, and he kept staring and staring. He took a fancy to the rose and felt a desire to come closer to that fragrant and beautiful creature. And to express his tender feelings, he could think of nothing better to say than these words:

"You wait," he croaked, "I'll gobble you up!"

The rose shuddered. Why was she fixed to her stem? The free birds twittered around her, fluttering and hopping from twig to twig; sometimes they flew far away, no one knew where. The butterflies, too, were free. How she envied them! If she were like one of them, she would take wing and flee the wicked eyes that pursued her with their staring look. The rose knew not that toads sometimes hunt butterflies too.

"I'll gobble you up!" the toad repeated, moving closer to the rose. He tried to speak in as sweet a voice as he could, but the effect was more sinister than ever.

"I'll gobble you up!" he repeated, staring all the time at the flower. The poor thing watched with horror as the nasty sticky paws clutched the branches of the bush on which she was growing. But it was hard for the toad to climb: his flat body could only crawl and hop about on level ground. After each attempt he looked up at the nodding swaying flower, and the poor rose had her heart in her mouth.

"Good God!" she prayed, "any other death but this!"

Meanwhile the toad kept clambering up. But at the point where the old stalks ended and the young twigs began he had rather a bad time of it. The smooth dark green bark of the rose bush was studded with hard sharp thorns. The toad pricked all his feet and his belly on them, and fell bleeding to the ground. He glared at the blossom with hatred.

"I said I would gobble you up, and I will!" he repeated.

Evening set in; it was time to think of supper, and so the wounded toad slunk away to catch the insects napping. Rage did not prevent him from stuffing his belly as full as he always did; his injuries were not serious and he decided, after having had a rest, to try and reach that fascinating and hateful flower again.

He took a fairly long rest. Morning came, then noon, and the rose had almost forgotten her enemy. She had opened out to the full now and was the most beautiful creation in the flower-garden. There was nobody to come and admire her, though: the young master lay helpless in his little bed, and his sister did not leave his side or go over to the window. Only the birds and the butterflies fluttered around the rose and the buzzing bees sometimes alighted on her open corolla and flew out covered with the yellow pollen, which gave them quite a shaggy look. A nightingale flew into the rose bush and began to sing his song. How unlike the croaking of the toad it was! The rose listened to the song and was happy. She thought the nightingale was singing for her, and perhaps he really was. She did not notice her enemy, who was creeping stealthily up the branches. This time the toad spared neither paws nor belly; covered with blood, he crawled doggedly up and up—and, all of a sudden, amid the sweet tender notes of the nightingale, she heard the familiar hideous croaking: "I said I would gobble you up, and I will!"

The toad glared at her from a near-by twig. The wicked creature had only to make a single movement in order to seize the flower. The rose realized that she was lost. . . .

The little master had been lying still for quite a time. Sitting in a chair by his bedside, his sister thought that he was asleep. In her lap lay an open book, but she was not reading it. Little by little her weary head drooped: the

poor girl had been sitting up with her sick brother for several nights, and now fell into a light doze.

"Masha," the boy suddenly whispered.

His sister started. She had been dreaming that she was sitting by the window, and her little brother was playing in the garden, like the year before, and was calling her. She opened her eyes, and seeing him in bed, emaciated and weak, she drew a deep sigh.

"What is it, darling?"

"Masha, you told me the roses were blossoming! May I . . . have one?"

"Of course you may, darling!" She went up to the window and looked at the bush. A single but gorgeous rose was growing on it.

"A rose has blossomed just for you, and such a lovely one! I'll put it here next to your bed in a glass of water, shall I?"

"Yes, do. I'd like it."

The girl took a scissors and went out into the garden. She had not been out of doors for a long time; the sun dazzled her, and the fresh air made her slightly dizzy. She went up to the bush at the very moment when the toad was making ready to seize the rose.

"Oh, what a horrid thing!" she cried, and seizing the twig, she gave it a hard shake. The toad dropped off and his belly hit the ground with a smack. In a fit of rage he tried to jump at the girl, but he could jump no higher than the hem of her dress, and was kicked far away. He did not dare to try again after that, and could do nothing but watch the girl from a safe distance. Carefully she cut the flower and took it into the room.

When the boy saw his sister with the flower in her hand he smiled feebly for the first time in many weeks, and, with an effort, made a movement with his emaciated hand.

"Let me have it," he whispered. "I want to smell it."

His sister laid the stalk in his hand and helped him to

move it up to his face. He drank in the sweet fragrance, and smiled happily, whispering, "Ah, how lovely!. . ."

Then his little face grew set and grave, and he fell silent for ever.

Although she had been cut before she began to shed her petals, the rose felt that she had not been cut in vain. She was placed in a glass all by herself at the head of the little coffin. There were whole bouquets there of other flowers, but, to tell the truth, no one even looked at them. Not so with the rose. When the young girl placed it on the table she raised it to her lips and kissed it. A teardrop rolled down her cheek on to the flower, and that was the best thing that had ever happened to the rose in all her life. When she began to fade she was laid between the leaves of a thick old book and dried, and then, many years afterwards, she was given to me. That is how I know the story.

1884

NADEZHDA NIKOLAYEVNA

I

I had long been wanting to start a diary. I have a special reason for taking up my pen. Some write their memoirs because they are of considerable historical interest; some because they wish to recapture the happy

days of their youth; others for the sake of gossiping and blackening people long since dead and defending themselves against accusations long since forgotten. I have none of these reasons. I am still a young man, who has not made history nor seen it made; I have no reason to blacken people, and no reason whatever to defend myself. To recapture past happiness? It was so short-lived and the end so frightful, that the memory of it is anything but pleasant.

Why then does a secret voice whisper it into my ear, why, when I wake up in the night, do familiar scenes and visions pass before me in the darkness, and why, when one pale image rises before me, do my face flame and my hands clench, and terror and rage clutch at my throat, as they did that day when I stood face to face with my mortal enemy?

I cannot rid myself of these haunting memories, and an odd thought has occurred to me. Perhaps, if I put them down on paper, I shall be finished with them; perhaps they will haunt me no longer, and will let me die in peace. That is the special reason that makes me take up my pen. Perhaps someone will read this diary, perhaps not. It is immaterial to me. Therefore, I need not apologize to my future readers either for my choice of subject, which cannot have the slightest interest for people accustomed to dealing with social, if not world, problems, or for the form in which my writings are set forth. True, I should like these lines to be read by one person, but that person will not blame me. Everything that has to do with me is dear to her. That person is my cousin.

What is keeping her so long today? It is three months now since I came to myself after that day. The first face that I saw was Sonya's. Ever since then she has been spending every evening with me. It has become with her a kind of service. She sits at my bedside or near the great easy chair when I feel strong enough to sit in it, and talks

to me, reads newspapers and books to me. It grieves her to see me so indifferent to the choice of reading matter, which I leave to her.

"Here is a new novel in the *Vestnik Yevropy*, Andrei."

"Very well, dear, let's have it. . . ."

"It's by a Mrs. Gay."

"All right. . . ."

And she starts on a rambling tale about a Mr. Scripple and a Miss Gordon, and after the first two pages turns her big kind eyes upon me and says:

"It isn't long; this magazine always condenses its novels."

"All right. I'm listening."

She goes on reading the circumstantial story, invented by Mrs. Gay, while I gaze at her lowered face, my thoughts elsewhere. And sometimes, at those places in the book where Mrs. Gay wants you to laugh, I feel bitter tears choking my throat. My cousin lays the book aside, looks at me with a searching anxious glance, and puts her hand on my forehead.

"Oh, Andrei, darling, again. . . . Come, come. Don't cry. It will all pass, you will forget it," she says in the tone with which a mother comforts a child who has got a bump on its forehead from falling down. And although my bump will pass only with life itself, which—I feel—is slowly ebbing from my body, I am nevertheless comforted.

Ah, my dear, dear cousin! How I appreciate this womanly tenderness! God bless you, and may the dark pages of your life—pages upon which my name is written—give place to a joyous tale of happiness! Only I hope that tale will not resemble the tiresome narrative of Mrs. Gay.

The bell! At last! It is she; she will come and bring with her into my dark stuffy room the smell of freshness, she will break its silence with her low sweet voice and light it up with her loveliness.

II

I do not remember my mother, but my father died when I was fourteen. My guardian, a distant relative, had me transferred to a high school in St. Petersburg, from which I graduated in four years. I was absolutely free; my guardian was a busy man occupied with his vast affairs, and his cares for me did not go beyond providing me with money, sufficient, in his opinion, to keep me out of poverty. It was not a large allowance, but quite enough to keep the wolf from the door and enable me to choose my own career.

The choice had been made long ago. At the age of four I had liked nothing so well as to mess about with pencils and paint, and by the time I had finished school I could paint fairly well, and had no difficulty whatever in entering the Academy of Arts.

Was I talented? Now that I shall never touch canvas again, I think I may look upon myself as an artist with an impartial eye. Yes, I was talented. I think so not because that was the opinion of my colleagues and experts, not because of the rapidity with which I finished the academy, but because of the peculiar feeling that stirred in me every time I sat down to begin work. No one who is not an artist can experience that sweet and painful emotion that grips you when you first approach a new canvas to limn your creation upon it. No one who is not an artist can experience that utter forgetfulness of everything around you, when your spirit is sunk in images. . . . Yes, I was talented, and would have made no ordinary painter.

There they are—my paintings, sketches and studies, my finished and unfinished pictures—hanging on the walls. And there she is. . . . I must ask my cousin to have it put away in another room. But no, I ought to have it hung up at the foot of my bed so that she can always look at me with that sad doom-haunted gaze of hers. In that blue dress and pretty white cap with the large tricoloured cockade at the side, and with those thick rebellious tresses of dark

auburn hair escaping from under its white frills, she looked at me as if she were alive. Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte! Should I bless or should I curse the hour when the idea of painting you occurred to me?

Bessonov, mind you, had always been against it. When I had first mentioned it to him, he had shrugged his shoulders and smiled ironically.

"You Russian painters are a crazy lot," he said. "Haven't we enough subjects of our own! Charlotte Corday! What is she to you? How can you possibly envisage that period, that setting?"

Perhaps he was right. But the image of that French heroine had gripped my imagination so strongly that I could not help painting her. I planned to do her full length, standing all alone straight in front of the spectator, with eyes gazing out before her; she had already made up her mind to perform her heroic crime, and this decision was written only upon her face, for the hand that was to deal the fatal blow still hung nerveless, looking white and tender against the dark blue woollen dress; a lace pelerine tied crosswise set off the soft neck, upon which the morrow would trace a bloody line. . . . I remember how her image had arisen in my mind. I had read her story in a sentimental and, perhaps, misleading book by Lamartine. Through the false pathos of this garrulous and flamboyant Frenchman I had obtained a clear and distinct vision of the girl, the fanatic champion of good. I read everything about her that I could get hold of, saw several portraits of her, and decided to paint a picture.

A man's first picture, like his first love, takes full possession of his soul. I carried the now completed image of her within me, I had thought over all the minutest details, and finally reached a point when I could conjure up at will with closed eyes the complete Charlotte.

But, starting the picture as I did with tremulous joy and excitement, I was immediately confronted by an unex-

pected and almost insuperable obstacle: I had no model to pose for me.

Strictly speaking, of course, there *were* models. I selected what I thought to be the most suitable candidate out of several of those who followed this vocation in St. Petersburg, and fell eagerly to work. But, my God, how unlike the cherished vision that rose so vividly before my closed eyes was this Anna Ivanovna of mine! She was an excellent sitter, who did not stir for an hour on end; she earned her ruble conscientiously, and derived no little satisfaction from the fact that she was able to pose in her dress without exposing her body.

"Isn't it wonderful to pose in your dress! Some men stare at you so, search you all over with their eyes. . . ." she had told me with a sigh at our first sitting, a tinge of colour suffusing her face.

It was only a couple of months since she had become a model, and she still could not get used to her vocation. Russian girls, I think, never can.

I did her hands, and shoulders, and her figure, but when I started on her face I was in despair. The plump young face with its slightly turned-up nose, and kindly little grey eyes that looked out confidingly and rather pathetically from under perfectly round eyebrows, completely screened from me the image of my dreams. I could not transfer those small indeterminate features to that other face. I struggled with my model for three or four days, then finally left her alone. There was no other model, so I decided to do a thing I really should not have done: to paint the face in imagination, to "make it up." The reason I decided to do this was because I saw my heroine in my mind's eye as clearly as if she were sitting before me in the flesh. But when I started work, I flung my brushes away. Instead of a living face I achieved a blank sketchiness that lacked flesh and blood.

I took the canvas off the easel and put it in a corner

facing the wall. The failure was a stunning blow to me. It seemed to me that after having conceived such a beautiful picture (it was really beautiful in my imagination) and not being able to paint it life was not worth living. I flung myself down on my bed and tried to drown my sorrow and vexation in sleep.

I remember a ring at the door just as I was dozing off. It was the postman with a letter from my cousin Sonya. She was delighted to hear that I was going to do a big and difficult work, and sorry that it was so hard to find a model. "Shall I be of any use when I have graduated from the institute? Wait another six months, Andrei," she wrote, "I'll join you in St. Petersburg and you will be able to paint ten Charlotte Cordays from me if you like . . . that is, if I bear the slightest resemblance to the one, who, as you write, now reigns in your heart."

Sonya is quite unlike Charlotte. She is incapable of inflicting wounds. She much prefers healing them, and does that wonderfully.

She would heal me, too . . . if that were only possible.

III

In the evening I went to see Bessonov.

I found him bent over his writing-desk, which was littered with books, manuscripts and press cuttings. His hand moved swiftly over the paper: he wrote very fast, in a neat florid hand without any crossings out. He glanced up at me and went on writing; apparently he was deeply engrossed in some thought at the moment and did not want to tear himself away from his work until he had committed it to paper. I sat down on the low, wide and very shabby sofa (he slept on it) standing in the shadows, and looked at him for fully five minutes. His clear-cut cold profile was very familiar to me: I had often drawn it in my sketch-book, and once even painted a sketch of it. I haven't

got that sketch: he sent it to his mother. That evening, however, perhaps because I was sitting in shadow and he was well lit up by the bright flame of the lamp under a green glass shade, or because my nerves were unstrung, his face looked oddly arresting. I looked at him and studied his head in detail, examining every tiny feature that had so far eluded me. It was, without a doubt, the head of a strong man. Perhaps a not very talented one, but certainly a strong one.

A square skull, passing down at the back almost without a curve into a thick powerful neck; a high bulging forehead; eyebrows depressed in the middle and creasing the skin in a vertical fold, strong jaws and thin lips—all this struck me today with a sense of newness.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" he suddenly asked me, laying his pen down and turning towards me.

"How did you know?"

"I felt it. I don't think it's imagination; I have often experienced things like that before."

"I was studying your face as a model. You have a very striking head, Sergei Vasilyevich."

"Is that so?" he said with a smile. "Nothing wrong with that, I hope."

"No, seriously. You remind me of someone . . . some famous person. . . ."

"Crook or murderer?" he said, interrupting me. "Anyway what's the matter? I can tell by your face that something has gone wrong. Is it the picture?"

"Well yes, I've chucked it up, chucked it up altogether . . ." I said despairingly.

"I thought so. You haven't got the model, I suppose?"

"No, no, and no. You know how hard I have been looking for one, Sergei Vasilyevich. But it isn't the thing. It's enough to drive a man mad. Especially this Anna Ivanovna; she has reduced me to the verge of distraction.

That flat face of hers has blotted everything out. Sometimes I even think the image itself is not so clear to my mind as it used to be."

"Was it clear?"

"Oh yes, perfectly! If one could paint with closed eyes one could ask for nothing better, really. With your eyes shut, she is right there in front of you."

I must have looked ludicrous with my eyes shut tight, because Bessonov burst out laughing.

"It's no laughing matter, I'm very upset," I said.

His laughter ceased abruptly.

"In that case I mustn't laugh. I can't make you out, though. Didn't I tell you to drop that subject?"

"I have dropped it."

"All that work and nervous strain for nothing, and now this worry on top of it! I knew it would be like that. Not because I foresaw that you wouldn't find a model, but because the subject is unsuitable. It has to be in your blood. You have to be a descendant of those people who lived through both Marat and Charlotte Corday, and the whole of those times. And what are you? The mildest of Russian intellectuals, weak as a lamb! You must be capable of such a deed yourself. And you? Could you throw away the brush if need be, and, to put it in high-flown language, take up the dagger? Why, you might as well try to make a journey to Jupiter. . . ."

"I have argued this point with you before, Bessonov, and neither of us, it seems, has been able to convince the other. If you call yourself an artist you've got to be able to put yourself in someone else's place. Did Raphael have to be the Virgin in order to paint his Madonna? Why, it's absurd, Bessonov. But I am contradicting myself: I don't want to argue with you, yet I'm the first to start arguing."

He wanted to say something, but waved his hand instead with a hopeless gesture.

"Have it your way!" he said, getting up and beginning

to pace the room from corner to corner, treading softly in his felt slippers. "Don't let us argue. Don't let us turn the knife in the wounded heart, as someone said somewhere."

"I don't think anyone said it anywhere."

"You may be right. I am in the habit of misquoting poetry. What about the samovar for consolation? It's about time."

He went up to the door and bawled like an officer at company drill: "Tea!"

I do not like him for the way he treats the servants. We said nothing for a long time. I sat leaning back against the cushions of the sofa, while he went on pacing up and down. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. At length he stopped in front of me and said in a business-like tone:

"If you had the model, would you try again?"

"Rather!" I said dejectedly. "But where can you get her?"

He took another turn about the room.

"You see, Lopatin.... There is a ... a person I know...."

"If she's a person of importance, she won't agree to pose."

"She's not important, anything but that. But ... there is a very important 'but' about it."

"But what 'buts' can there be, Bessonov? Unless you are joking?"

"I am joking, of course. It can't be done...."

"Sergei Vasilyevich ..." I began in a pleading tone.

"Listen what I'll tell you. Do you know what I appreciate in you?" he began, stopping in front of me. "You and I are about the same age—I am about two years your senior. But I have been through and experienced what it will probably take you another ten years to go through. I'm not a clean man, I am debauched" (he enunciated the word distinctly). "There are many men worse than I, but

I consider myself more blameworthy. I hate myself for not being able to keep as clean as I should like to . . . as clean as you, for instance."

"What debauchery and cleanness are you talking about?" I asked.

"I call things by their real names. I often envy you your serenity and clear conscience; I envy what you have. . . . But, never mind that! It can't be done!" he interrupted himself angrily. "Let's drop the subject."

"At least, you can explain what it is or who it is I have?" I said.

"Nothing. . . . Nobody. . . . On second thoughts, though, I'll tell you: your cousin, Sophia Mikhailovna. She is not a near cousin of yours, is she?"

"She's a second cousin," I answered.

"Yes, a second cousin. She is your fiancée," he said in a positive tone.

"How do you know?" I exclaimed.

"I know. I guessed at first, but now I know. My mother told me, she wrote me about it recently. Somehow, she got to know her there. You know how it is in a provincial town, where everybody knows one another? It's true, isn't it? She is your fiancée?"

"What if she is?"

"And since childhood? Your parents arranged it?"

"They did. I thought it a joke at first, but now I see that it looks serious. I didn't want it to become known, but I'm not particularly sorry that you have found it out."

"I envy you your having a fiancée," he said in a low voice, staring before him and heaving a painful sigh.

"I never thought you could be so sentimental, Bessonov."

"Yes, I envy you your fiancée," he proceeded, ignoring my interruption. "I envy you your cleanness, your hopes, your future happiness, the unsquandered affection and love that have been growing from childhood."

He took my hand, made me get off the sofa and led me up to the looking-glass.

"Look at me and look at yourself," he said. "Why, you are

Hyperion to a satyr.

Satyr—that's me. Yet I'm the stronger man: my frame is bigger, and my health is robust by nature. But just compare: do you see this?" (he lightly touched the thinning hair on his forehead). "Yes, sir, all this is 'the ardour of the soul wasted in the wilderness!' Ardour of the soul, be hanged! It's just swinishness."

"What about going back to where we were, Bessonov? Why don't you want to acquaint me with the model?"

"Because she has had a hand in this wasting of ardour. I told you she is an unimportant person and very much so. In fact she stands on the lowest rung of the human ladder. Below that lies an abyss into which she may soon fall. The abyss of utter ruin. She is utterly lost as it is."

"I think I understand you, Bessonov."

"I'm glad you do. Now you see what my 'but' was?"

"You can keep it to yourself. Why do you consider it your duty to keep watch and ward over me?"

"I have told you what I like you for. It's for being clean. Not you alone—the two of you. You are both such a rare phenomenon: a thing that breathes freshness and fragrance. I envy you, and am glad that I can at least take a detached view. And you want me to spoil the whole thing? No, there is nothing doing."

"Oh, come, this is a bit thick, Bessonov. You must have little faith in the cleanness you have found in me if you are afraid of the awful things a mere acquaintance with this woman will lead to."

"Look here. It's up to me to let you have her or not. I consult my own wishes in this matter. I don't want to let you have her. And I'm not going to. *Dixi.*"

Now he was sitting and I was pacing the carpet excitedly.

"You think she would be suitable?"

"Rather. On second thoughts, no, not very," he broke in sharply. "She's quite unsuitable. But enough of her."

I pleaded, lost my temper, tried to prove to him the absurdity of his self-imposed task of guarding my virtue, but achieved nothing. He flatly refused, and concluded by saying:

"I have never said *dixi* twice."

"I congratulate you on it," I answered with annoyance.

We talked a little over the tea and parted company.

IV

I did nothing for a whole fortnight. I only went to the academy to paint my programme work on the ghastly Biblical theme of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt. I had it all finished—both Lot and his household—but the pillar simply baffled me. I couldn't think of anything. Was it to be something in the nature of a gravestone, or just a salt-built statue of Lot's wife?

Life ran its leisurely course. I received two letters from Sonya. After reading her sweet nothings about the goings on at the institute and the books that she was reading secretly from the Argus-eyed schoolmistress, I added them to the sheaf of previous letters, which were tied together with a pink ribbon. That ribbon had been acquired when I was fifteen, and so far I had not been able to screw up the courage to throw it away. Why should I? There was no harm in it, was there? But what would Bessonov have said had he seen this evidence of my sentimentality? Would he be touched by my "cleanness" or start mocking me?

He had upset me seriously, though. What was I to do? Drop the picture or start looking for a model again?

An unforeseen incident came to my aid. One day, while I was lying on the sofa with a silly French novel, feeling

rather bemused by all those mortuaries, and detectives, and resurrecting heroes who had as many lives as twenty ordinary mortals, the door opened and Gelfreich walked in.

Imagine, if you can, a pair of skinny crooked legs, a huge body burdened with two humps, long thin arms, shoulders hunched up high as if expressing perpetual doubt, and a young, pale, slightly puffy but good-looking face on a well-poised head. He was an artist. Art lovers are familiar with his pictures, painted for the most part on one and the same subject with slight variations. His subject was cats; drowsing cats, cats with little birds, cats with arching backs; he even had a tipsy cat with gay eyes sitting before a glass of wine. Gelfreich achieved in cats the peak of perfection, but he never attempted anything else. If the picture he was doing had any other accessories in it besides cats—some greenery, say, from behind which a pink little nose and golden eyes with narrow pupils were to peep out, or some drapery, or a basket to house a litter of kittens with huge transparent ears—he had recourse to me. Now as well he had come in with something wrapped up in blue paper. He gave me his white bony hand, then laid the package down on the table and began undoing it.

"Another cat?" I said.

"Yes. I need a bit of rug here . . . and a bit of sofa on the other one."

He unfolded the paper and showed me two small pictures about a foot square; the figures of the cats were quite finished, but they were painted against a background of white canvas.

"If not a sofa, then something else . . . anything you like."

"When will you drop these cats, Semyon?"

"I ought to, I know, they're a nuisance. But what can I do? Money! This rubbish, now, will bring me two hundred rubles."

Saying which, he stood with skinny legs apart, shrugged his hunched up shoulders, and spread his hands, as if to express astonishment at the fact that such rubbish could find a buyer.

His cats had made his reputation in two years. Neither before nor since (except, perhaps, in a picture by the late Huhn) had I seen such skill in the portrayal of cats of all ages, colours and positions. But in giving them his exclusive attention Gelfreich neglected everything else.

"Money, money," he repeated musingly. "What does a hunchbacked devil like me need so much money for? Yet I feel that it is becoming more and more difficult for me to get down to real work. I envy you, Andrei. I have been painting nothing but these creatures for two years. Of course, I'm very fond of them, especially the real ones. But I feel I'm being sucked under. Mind you, I am more talented than you are, Andrei, don't you think so?" he asked me in a tone of kindly tact.

"I don't think," I answered, smiling, "I am *sure* of it."

"How's your Charlotte getting on?"

I made a gesture of despair.

"Bad?" he said. "Show me."

Seeing that I made no move and shook my head with a negative gesture, he went over to the stacks of old canvases standing in the corner and began to rummage among them himself. Then he put the reflector on the lamp, set my unfinished picture on the easel and turned the light on it. For a long time he said nothing.

"I understand you," he said at length. "It may make a good thing. But it's Anna Ivanovna nevertheless. Do you know what I have come for? Come along with me."

"Where to?"

"Anywhere. Out in the street. I feel so bored, Andrei. I'm afraid I am going to backslide again."

"Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. I feel the demon thirst coming

at me. 'Oh, could I but dream and forget,' " he suddenly sang out in a reedy tenor. "Really, I came to see you so as not to be alone—once I get started, you know, I'll be good for a fortnight. Then I'll be ill. Besides, it's very bad for the health . . . especially with a torso like mine."

He turned twice on his heels to show me his two humps.

"I tell you what," I suggested, "move over here and stay with me. I'll keep you off it."

"That would be fine. I'll think it over. And now, let's go."

I dressed and we went out.

We tramped through the St. Petersburg slush for a long time. It was autumn. A stiff wind was blowing from the sea. The water was rising. We stood on the Palace Embankment watching the infuriated river lashing the granite parapets with foaming waves. From the black abyss that engulfed the opposite bank there came an occasional flash as of lightning, followed in fifteen seconds by a heavy thud: they were firing guns at the fort. The water was rising.

"I wish it would rise still more. I have never seen a flood—it must be interesting," said Gelfreich.

We lingered on the embankment, peering in silence into the raging darkness.

"It won't rise any more," Gelfreich said at length. "The wind is dropping, I believe. What a pity! I have never seen a flood. . . . Let's go."

"Where?"

"Just anywhere. Come with me. I'll take you to a place I know. Nature in this mood frightens me with her trashy tricks. Let us rather go and see some human trash."

"Where is that, Semyon?"

"Leave that to me. Cab!" he shouted.

We got in and drove off. In the Fontanka, Gelfreich stopped the cab outside a wooden gate decorated with carvings and gaudily painted designs.

We passed through a muddy yard between two long two-storeyed buildings of old construction. Two powerful reflectors threw a flood of brilliant light into our faces; they hung on either side of an old porch, which was gaudily decorated with painted carvings in the so-called Russian style. People preceded us, going in the same direction as we were—men in fur coats, and women in long "diplomats" and "Palmerstons" made of a material that laid claim to expensive luxury: silk flowers on a velveteen field, with a boa round the neck and a white silk shawl on the head; all these people went through the entrance, and ascending a few steps, took off their outer garments, revealing for the most part cheap-luxury toilets, where cotton did service for silk, brass for gold, polished glass for diamonds, and ceruse, carmine, and sienna for a fresh complexion and sparkling eyes.

We bought tickets at the booking office and entered a suite of rooms set with small tables. A stuffy atmosphere surcharged with odd exhalations assailed me. Tobacco smoke, mingled with the smell of beer and cheap pomade, drifted over the heads of the noisy crowd. Some wandered about aimlessly, others sat at the tables over bottles; there were women here as well as men, and the expression of their faces was strange. All pretended to be gay, and talked about something—God only knows what! We sat down at one of the tables. Gelfreich ordered tea. I sat stirring mine with a spoon, listening to a plump little brunette with a Gypsy cast of countenance, who sat at a near-by table, answering her partner, who had asked her whether she came here often. She spoke with slow dignity in a voice that had a strong German accent and a shade of something like pride in it.

"I come here once a week. I cannot come often because I have to be in another place. Let me see, the day before yesterday I was at the German Club, yesterday at the Orpheum, today here, tomorrow at the Bolshoi Theatre,

the day after tomorrow at the Prikazchik Club, then the Operetta, then the Chateau-de-fleur.... Yes, I go somewhere every day: and so *die ganze Woche.*"

And she looked at her companion proudly. He visibly shrank on hearing such an elaborate programme of entertainments. A fairish man of about twenty-five with a low forehead over which hung a mop of hair, and wearing a brass watch-chain, he stared in awe at his gorgeous companion and sighed. Alas, it was not for him, a humble Apraksin shop assistant, to go gallivanting with this lady around the clubs and café chantants day in day out!

We got up and sauntered through the rooms. At the end of the suite a wide door led into a dance hall. Yellow silk curtains on the windows, a brightly painted ceiling, rows of bentwood chairs against the walls, in a corner of the hall a large white niche in the form of a shell, in which sat an orchestra of fifteen men. The women for the most part walked about in pairs with their arms round each other; the men sat against the walls, watching them. The musicians were tuning their instruments. The face of the leading violinist seemed rather familiar to me.

"Is that you, Fyodor Karlovich?" I asked, touching his shoulder.

Fyodor Karlovich looked round. My God, how fat and flabby he had grown, and grey too!

"Yes, I'm Fyodor Karlovich," he said.

"Don't you remember the Gymnasium? You used to come to our dance lesson with your violin."

"Ah! I still sit there on a little stool in the corner of the hall. I remember you now. You used to waltz very well."

"Have you been here long?"

"Over two years now."

"Do you remember how once you came early and played Ernst's Elegy in the empty hall? I was listening."

A gleam came into the musician's lacklustre eyes.

"Were you? Were you really? I thought nobody heard

me. Yes, I played sometimes. . . . Now I can't. I play here now; at Shrovetide, Easter—in the daytime at the fairs, in the evening here. . . ." He paused. "I have four sons and a daughter," he murmured. "And one of the boys is finishing the *Annen-Schule* this year and is entering the university. I can't play Ernst's Elegy."

The conductor waved his bow several times, and the tinny orchestra struck up a raucous polka. After beating time with his bow for three or four bars, the conductor joined his squeaky fiddle to the general chorus. The couples whirled in the dance, the orchestra made a hideous noise.

"Let's go away, Semyon," I said. "This is a frightful bore. Let's go home and have some tea, and talk about something decent."

"Decent?" he queried with a smile. "All right, let's go."

We began to edge our way towards the exit. All of a sudden Gelfreich stopped.

"Look," he said. "Bessonov."

I looked round and saw Bessonov. He was sitting at a marble-topped table on which stood a bottle of wine, glasses and plates. Bending low, his eyes gleaming, he was whispering animatedly to a woman in a black silk dress who was sitting at the same table. I could not see her face, but I noticed that she had a slender figure, slim hands and neck, and black hair combed smoothly upwards from the neck.

"Thank fate," Gelfreich said to me. "Do you know who that is? Rejoice, it is she, your Charlotte Corday."

"She? Here?"

V

Holding a glass of wine in his hand, Bessonov looked up at me with bloodshot animated eyes, and his face expressed obvious annoyance.

He got up and came over to us.

"You here?"

"We came to have a look at you," I answered, smiling. "And I am not sorry, because. . . ."

He intercepted my glance as it glided over his companion, and interrupted me sharply.

"Put that out of your head. Gelfreich here must have told you already. But it won't work. I won't have it. I'll take her away. . . ."

And going up to her quickly, he said in a loud voice:

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna, let us be going."

She turned her head, and I saw for the first time her surprised face.

Yes, I saw her for the first time in that den. She was sitting there with this man, who descended sometimes to debauchery from the lofty eminence of an egotistically active life; she was sitting over an empty bottle of wine; her eyes were slightly inflamed, her pale face jaded, her costume careless and defiant. Around us was a jostling throng of idle revellers—merchants who had given up hope of ever being able to live sober, wretched shop assistants who spent their drab lives behind counters and found consolation in dens like this, fallen women and girls whose lips had touched the vile cup, all kinds of modistes, shop girls. I saw that she was already falling into the abyss which Bessonov had spoken to me about, if she had not already done so.

"Come along, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, let us go!" Bessonov hurried her.

She got up, looked at him in surprise, and said:

"What for? Where?"

"I don't want to stay here. . . ."

"You can go then. This is your acquaintance and Gelfreich, I believe?"

"Listen, Nadya . . ." Bessonov said sharply.

She frowned and threw him an angry look.

"What right have you to address me like that? Hullo, Semyon, how do you do, my dear!"

Semyon caught her hands and squeezed them.

"I say, Bessonov," he said, "stop fooling. You can go home, if you like, or remain here, but Nadezhda Nikolayevna is going to stay with us. We want to talk to her, and it's something very important. Nadezhda Nikolayevna, let me introduce to you my friend and his (pointing to the scowling Bessonov)—Lopatin, artist."

"She is so fond of pictures, Andrei!" he suddenly said to me in a joyful tone. "Last year I showed her over the exhibition. She saw your sketches, too. Do you remember?"

"I do," she answered.

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna!" Bessonov said once more.

"Leave me alone. Go wherever you like. I am staying here with Semyon and, er . . . Monsieur Lopatin. I want to relieve my mind . . . of you!" she suddenly cried, seeing that Bessonov was about to say something. "I am tired of you. Go away and leave me alone."

He turned away sharply and went out without saying good-bye to anyone.

"That's better . . . without him. . . ." Nadezhda Nikolayevna said with a painful sigh.

"What are you sighing for, Nadezhda Nikolayevna?" asked Semyon.

"I am sighing because he ought not to take the liberties which all these maimed creatures take" (she indicated the surging crowd around us with a motion of her head). "I am sick of it all. Worse than sick. I can't find words for it. Let us have something to drink, Semyon."

Semyon glanced at me ruefully.

"Well, you see, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, I really wouldn't mind, only he. . . ."

"What about him? He'll drink with us, too."

"He doesn't drink."

"Then you will."

"He won't let me."

"That's bad. Who can prevent you?"

"I promised to do what he tells me."

Nadezhda Nikolayevna looked at me with interest.

"Is that so!" she said. "Ah well, our wills are free. If you don't want to, don't. I'll drink by myself."

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna," I began, "forgive me for taking such a liberty on our first acquaintance. . . ."

I felt a hot flush mounting my cheeks. She looked at me, smiling.

"Well, what is it?"

"On our very first acquaintance I would ask you please not to . . . not to do this, not to behave the way you are doing. . . . I wanted to ask you a favour, too."

A look of sadness crossed her face.

"Not to behave the way I am doing?" she said. "I am afraid I can no longer behave in any other way. I have got out of the habit. Very well then, I'll try it, to please you. What is the favour?"

Stammering and stumbling over my words, I told her what it was about. She listened attentively, her grey eyes full upon my face. The strained attention with which she was following me—or perhaps it was something else—gave to her glance a severe and somewhat harsh expression.

"Very well," she said at length. "I understand what you want. I can make the face you need too."

"That's not necessary really, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, so long as it's your face."

"All right. When do I have to be at your place?"

"Tomorrow at eleven, if you can."

"So early? In that case, I'll have to go to bed. Will you see me home, Semyon?"

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna," I said, "there is another thing we haven't arranged yet. This is not done for nothing, you know."

"You mean you are going to pay me?" she said, and I caught a proud offended ring in her voice.

"Yes, otherwise I won't have it," I said firmly.

She gave me a haughty almost defiant look, but the next moment her face assumed a thoughtful expression. We were silent. I felt awkward. A tinge of colour suffused her cheeks and her eyes brightened.

"Very well," she said, "you may pay me. As much as you pay other models. What will I get for Charlotte, Semyon?"

"About sixty rubles, I should think," he answered.

"And how long will you paint her?"

"A month."

"Good, very good!" she said animatedly. "I'll try and take money from you. Thank you."

She gave me her slim hand and squeezed mine hard.

"Does he sleep at your place?" she asked, turning to me.

"Yes."

"I shan't keep him long. He'll only see me home."

Within half an hour I was at home, and five minutes after me Gelfreich returned. We undressed, went to bed and blew out the candles. I was beginning to fall asleep.

"Are you sleeping, Lopatin?" Semyon's voice suddenly came out of the darkness.

"No, why?"

"I say, I would let my left hand be chopped off this very minute to make that woman feel happy and clean," he said in a voice deep with emotion.

"Why not the right hand?" I said sleepily.

"Silly! What will I paint with?" Semyon said seriously.

VI

When I awoke the next day, grey morning was looking into the window.

I glanced in the dim light at the pale, handsome face

of Gelfreich, who was sleeping on the sofa, and recalling the previous evening and the fact that I now had a model for my picture, I turned over on the other side and went to sleep again with the light sleep of early morning.

"Lopatin!" a voice sounded.

I heard it through my sleep. It coincided with my dreams, and I did not wake up, although someone was touching my shoulder.

"Lopatin, wake up," the voice said.

I sprang to my feet and saw Bessonov.

"Is that you, Bessonov?"

"Yes. You didn't expect me so early?" he said in a low voice. "Speak quietly, I should not like to wake the hunchback."

"What do you want?"

"Dress and wash yourself; I'll tell you. Come into the other room. Let him sleep."

I took my clothes and boots under my arm and went into the studio to dress. Bessonov was very pale.

"You look as if you haven't slept all night," I said.

"Yes, I did. I got up very early and did some work. Let us have some tea, and we shall talk. By the way, show me your picture."

"Not now, Bessonov. I'll finish it soon, and then you'll see it in a new and better version. Perhaps you are not pleased that I have gone against your wishes, but you wouldn't believe how glad I am that I shall finish it now, that things have turned out the way they have. I could never have hoped for anything better than Nadezhda Nikolayevna."

"I will not have you paint her," he said in a low suppressed voice.

"You haven't come here to quarrel with me, surely?"

"I won't have her coming here every day and spending hours with you. I won't let her."

"Have you the power? How can you prevent her? How

can you prevent me?" I demanded with a sense of growing irritation.

"Power . . . power. . . Just a word or two will suffice. I'll remind her what she is. I'll tell her what you are. I'll tell her about your cousin, Sophia Mikhailovna."

"Please leave my cousin out of it. If you have any claims on that woman—even if what you have told me about her is true, even if she *is* a fallen woman and dozens of men have similar claims on her—you may have claims on her but not on my cousin. I forbid you to tell her anything about my cousin! Do you hear?"

I felt my voice grow vibrant with menace. He was beginning to make me lose my temper.

"Oh, so you are showing your claws! I didn't know you had them. Very well, you are right—I have no claims whatever on Sophia Mikhailovna. I will not dare to utter her name in vain. But this . . . this. . . ."

He paced the room excitedly several times from corner to corner. I could see that he was deeply agitated. I could not make out what was the matter with him. During our last conversation his words and tone had expressed such undisguised contempt for the woman, yet now. . . . I wonder?

"I say, Bessenov, you love her!"

He halted, threw me an odd glance, and said curtly, "I do not."

"Then what are you worrying about? Why make such a fuss? You don't expect me to believe that your sole concern is to save my soul from the fell clutches of this imaginary demon."

"That's my business," he said. "But remember this—by hook or by crook I'll prevent you. I won't have it! Do you hear?" he shouted defiantly.

I felt the blood rush to my head. In the corner where I happened to be standing lay all kinds of lumber, such as canvases, brushes, a broken easel. Among it stood a stick

with a sharp iron point to which a large sunshade was screwed during outdoor work in the summer. I had casually picked up that spike, and when Bessonov uttered his "I won't have it," I drove the iron point into the floor with all my might. It sank into the boards an inch deep.

I did not say a word, but Bessonov glanced at me astonished, and with even, as I thought, a startled look in his eyes.

"Good-bye," he said. "I am going. You are much too worked up."

I had calmed down meanwhile.

"Wait, don't go away," I said.

"Sorry, but I have to be going. Good-bye."

And he went. I pulled the spike out of the floor with an effort, and remember touching the slightly warmed polished metal with my finger. It occurred to me for the first time that this was a terrible weapon, which could kill a man on the spot.

Gelfreich went to the academy, and I sat waiting for my model not without a certain nervousness. I had put up an entirely new canvas and got everything ready.

I could not say that I was thinking only of my picture at the time. I recalled the previous evening with its queer and unfamiliar surroundings, the unexpected and lucky meeting, that strange woman, a fallen woman, who had instantly won all my sympathy, the odd behaviour of Bessonov. . . . What did he want of me? Was it true that he did not love her? Then why that contemptuous attitude towards her? Could he not save her if he wanted?

With these thoughts in my mind, my hand with the carbon moved over the canvas, making sketches of the pose in which I wanted to paint Nadezhda Nikolayevna, and rubbing them out one after the other.

Punctually at eleven the door bell tinkled, and a minute later she appeared for the first time on the threshold of my room. Oh, how well I remember her pale face as she

stood agitated and embarrassed (yes, embarrassment had now replaced the expression of the day before) in the doorway! It was as if she did not dare to come into the room, a room in which she afterwards found happiness, the only bright moments in her life, and . . . her end. Not the end which Bessonov had spoken of. I cannot write about it. I must wait till I have calmed down.

VII

Sonya does not know that I am writing these bitter pages. She still comes every day to sit at my bedside or in the armchair. My friend, my poor hunchback, comes to see me very often too. He has grown very thin and haggard, and hardly speaks. Sonya says that he is working hard. I wish him luck and success!

She came, as she had promised, punctually at eleven. She walked in timidly, answered my greeting shyly and sat down in silence in the armchair that stood in a corner of the studio.

"You are very punctual, Nadezhda Nikolayevna," I said, as I began laying the paint on the palette.

She looked at me and did not answer.

"I don't know how to thank you for having consented," I went on, feeling myself blushing with embarrassment. These were not the words I wanted to say to her. "I have been looking for a model so long that I wanted to drop the picture altogether."

"Haven't you any models at the academy?" she asked.

"We have, but they're no good for me. Look at this face."

I got Anna Ivanovna's photograph out from a heap of rubbish lying on the table and handed it to her. She looked at it and smiled faintly.

"Yes, that's not what you want," she said. "That's not Charlotte Corday."

"You know the story of Charlotte Corday?' I asked.

She glanced at me with an odd look of mingled surprise and pain.

"Why should I not know it?" she said. "I have been to school. I have forgotten a good deal now, leading this life, but I still remember something. One never forgets things like these."

"What school did you go to, Nadezhda Nikolayevna?"

"Why do you want to know? If you don't mind, let us begin."

Her tone had suddenly changed. She uttered the words curtly and sullenly, the way she had spoken to Bessonov the day before.

I fell silent. I got out of the wardrobe the dark-blue dress, cap and all the other accessories of Charlotte's costume which I had had sewn, and asked her to go into the next room and change. I had barely had time to prepare what I needed for my work when she reappeared.

Confronting me stood my picture.

"Oh, my God, my God!" I exclaimed with delight. "Isn't it wonderful! Tell me, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, have we never met before? There is no other way to account for it. I have always imagined my picture exactly as you are now. I think I have seen you somewhere. Your face must have subconsciously impressed itself upon my memory. Tell me, where have I seen you?"

"Where could you have seen me?" she reiterated. "I don't know. I never met you until yesterday. Will you please begin. Show me how I am to stand, and begin painting."

I asked her to take up her position, adjusted the folds of her dress, touched her hands slightly to give them that nerveless look which I had in mind, and went back to my easel.

She stood before me. She stands before me now, right here, on this canvas. She looks at me as if she were real.

She has the same wistful expression, the same shadow of death upon her pale face that she had worn that day.

I wiped off the sketch I had made in carbon and dashed off one of Nadezhda Nikolayevna. Then I began painting. Never before nor after had I worked so swiftly and effectively. The time flew imperceptibly, and it was not until an hour later that, happening to look up at my model's face, I perceived that she was ready to drop from fatigue.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" I said, helping her down from the dais on which she had been standing and seating her in an armchair. "I have tired you out."

"That's all right," she answered, pale but smiling. "If I am going to earn my bread I must suffer a bit. I am glad that you are so enthusiastic about it. May I look at it?" she said, with a motion of her head towards the picture, the face of which she could not see.

"Why, of course!"

"Oh, what a smear!" she cried. "I have never seen the beginning of an artist's work. It's so interesting! And do you know, I can see what this smear is going to be. You have conceived a very good picture, Andrei Nikolayevich. I shall try my best to make it a success . . . as far as it depends on me."

"What can you do?"

"As I said yesterday. . . . I will give you the expression you want. It will make it easier for you."

She quickly took up her position, threw her head back and dropped her arms, while her face expressed all that I had dreamt of for my picture. It depicted determination and anguish, pride and fear, love and hatred.

"Is it all right?" she asked. "If it is, I will stand like this as long as you like."

"I could ask for nothing better, Nadezhda Nikolayevna; but it will be difficult for you to hold that expression for long. Thank you. We shall see. It's a long way off yet. You will have lunch with me, I hope?"

She declined and I had some trouble persuading her.

Agafya Alexeyevna, who looked after all my needs, served us lunch; we sat down at the table together for the first time. How many times this happened afterwards! Nadezhda Nikolayevna ate little without speaking; she was apparently shy. I poured her out a glass of wine, which she drank off almost at once. The colour kindled in her pale cheeks.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, "have you known Bessonov long?"

The question caught me unawares. Remembering what had taken place between me and Bessonov because of her, I was taken aback.

"Why do you blush? But never mind, just answer my question."

"Yes, a long time. Since childhood."

"Is he a good man?"

"Yes, I suppose he is. He is honest, he works hard. He is a very talented man. He treats his mother well."

"He has a mother? Where is she?"

I named the place, adding: "She has a little house there. He sends her money and visits her sometimes. I have never seen a more doting mother."

"Then why doesn't he bring her out here?"

"I don't think she wants to come. I don't know, really. She has a house there, and is used to the place."

"That isn't true," Nadezhda Nikolayevna said musingly. "He doesn't send for his mother because he thinks she will be in his way here. I don't know it, but that's what I think. She will embarrass him. She is a provincial lady, the widow of some petty government clerk. She will shock him."

She gave the word "shock" a sarcastic emphasis.

"I don't like the man, Andrei Nikolayevich," she said.

"Why? He's a good fellow, really."

"I don't like him. I am afraid of him. . . . But there, let us get on with the work."

She took her place. The short autumn day was drawing to a close.

I worked till dusk, giving Nadezhda Nikolayevna an occasional breathing space, and it was not until the colours became blurred and the figure standing on the dais in front of me became wrapped in shadow that I laid down my brushes. Nadezhda Nikolayevna changed and went away.

VIII

That evening I helped Semyon to move over to my rooms. He lived in Sadovaya, in a great building packed from top to bottom with tenants. The more aristocratic part of the house facing Sadovaya was occupied by furnished apartments kept by a retired captain named Grum-Skrzebicki who let his fairly large and untidy rooms to young artists, students and musicians, who formed the bulk of his tenants. The stern captain, himself a model of discretion, strictly observed the proprieties of what he called his "hotel."

I ascended a spiral iron staircase and entered a corridor. From the first door issued running passages of a violin, a little farther down a violoncello could be heard droning, and near the end of the corridor someone was pounding on a piano. I knocked at the door of Gelfreich's room.

"Come in!" he cried in his high-pitched voice.

He was sitting on the floor, putting his belongings into a huge box. A strapped portmanteau lay near by. Semyon was packing without any system whatever. At the bottom of the box he had put a pillow, and on top of that the unscrewed parts of a table lamp wrapped up in paper, then a small leather mattress, boots, a batch of sketches, a box of

paints, books and various odds and ends. Near the box sat a big tawny cat, gazing into its master's face. This cat, according to Gelfreich, had a permanent job with him.

"I am ready, Andrei," said Gelfreich. "I am very glad that you are taking me to live with you. Did you have a sitting today? Did she come?"

"Yes, Semyon, she came," I said, inwardly exulting. "Do you remember that phrase you said last night . . . about giving your left hand?"

"Well?" he asked, sitting down on the box, smiling.

"I am beginning to understand you, Semyon."

"There, you see! Ah, Andrei, Andrei, drag her out of it! I can't do it. I'm a stupid hunchbacked devil. You know only too well that I won't be able to drag my own weight through life, all through a long life, without someone's assistance—yours, for instance—leave alone supporting someone else! I need someone myself to save me from drunkenness, to take me under his wing, make me work, keep my money for me, paint my baskets, sofas and all the rest of the furniture for my cats. Ah, Andrei, what would I do without you!"

On a sudden affectionate impulse, Semyon jumped off the box, ran up to me, flung his arms round me and pressed his head to my breast. His soft silky hair touched my lips. Then, as quickly, he ran away into a corner of the room (I have a strong suspicion that he brushed away a tear in doing so) and seated himself in an armchair standing there in the shadows.

"There, see how weak I am! But you . . . you are different, Andrei. Get her out of it, Andrei!"

I said nothing.

"There was another man who could have done it," Semyon continued, "but he did not want to."

"Bessonov?" I said.

"Yes, Bessonov."

"Has he known her long, Semyon?"

"Yes; before me. That man's head is all drawers and compartments; he pulls one out, takes out a ticket, reads what is written on it, then acts accordingly. Here was this opportunity. Sees a fallen girl. He goes at once to the compartments in his head (they are all arranged there alphabetically), pulls out a ticket, and reads: *There is no return for them.*"

Semyon became silent. With his chin propped in his hand he gazed at me thoughtfully.

"Tell me, how did they get acquainted? What are these strange relations between them?"

"Some other time, Andrei. Not now. She may tell you herself, perhaps. I shouldn't have said 'perhaps'—she is sure to tell you. You are that kind, you know. . . ." Semyon said, smiling. "Let's go, I must settle up with the captain."

"Have you any money?"

"Yes. The cats see to that."

He went out into the corridor and shouted something to the servant. A minute later the captain himself appeared. He was a sturdy thickset old man with a very fresh, clean-shaven face. On coming into the room he scraped a foot with a swaggering flourish, shook hands with Gelfreich and acknowledged my presence with a silent bow.

"What does the *pan* want?" he asked politely.

"I am leaving you, Captain."

"As you please," the latter said, shrugging his shoulders. "I was perfectly satisfied with you, sir. I am glad to have such excellent and educated people living in my hotel. Is the gentleman an artist too?" he added, turning to me with another elegant bow. "Allow me to introduce myself: Captain Grum-Skrzebicki, an old soldier."

I shook hands and gave my name.

"Pan Lopatin?" exclaimed the captain, his face expressing respectful surprise. "That is a well-known name. I have heard it from all pupils of the academy. Very happy to

have met you, sir. I wish you the fame of Semiradski and Matejko. Where are you moving to?" the captain asked Gelfreich.

"To his place," the latter answered with an embarrassed smile.

"Although you rob me of an excellent tenant, I am not annoyed. The right of friendship comes first. . . ." the captain said with another bow. "I will bring my book in a minute."

He went out with his head high in the air. There was something martial in his step.

"Where did he serve?" I asked Semyon.

"I don't know. All I know is that he is not a Russian captain. I have seen his passport, it simply says nobleman Ksawery Grum-Skrzebicki. He tells everyone confidentially that he was in the insurrection. He still has a fowling-piece hanging on his wall."

The captain reappeared with his book and abacus. After consulting the book and clicking the counters for a minute or two, he announced the sum that Gelfreich owed him for rent and meals up to the end of the month. Semyon paid him and we parted company in a most friendly manner. When the things had been carried out, Semyon took the tawny cat under his arm (evidently the sight of the desolate room had disturbed it, for it had been rubbing itself anxiously against his legs, and miaowing from time to time, its tail standing up like a little stick) and we rode off.

IX

There were three or four more sittings. Nadezhda Nikolayevna came at ten or eleven and stayed till dusk. I often asked her to stay and have dinner with us, but she always retired hastily to the next room as soon as the sitting was over, changed the blue dress for her black one and took her leave at once.

Her face had altered considerably during those few days. There was an air of brooding misery in the lines of her mouth and the hollows of her grey eyes. She seldom spoke to me, and was slightly more animated only when Gelfreich was sitting in the studio at his easel. Despite my advice to take up something more serious, he continued to paint his cats one after another. In addition to the tawny model, some five or six cats of varied age, sex and colour had made their appearance in our rooms, and Agafya dutifully fed them, although she waged ceaseless war against them. These hostilities mainly took the form of gathering the cats up under her arms and throwing them out on the backstairs. But the cats cried so piteously at the door that our softhearted housekeeper relented. The door was opened and the cats were given the run of the place once more.

How vividly I recollect those long quiet sittings! The picture was nearing completion, and a vague oppressive feeling gradually crept into my heart. I felt that when I had no further need of Nadezhda Nikolayevna as a model, we would part. I recalled my conversation with Gelfreich the day he had moved over; often, when gazing at her pale brooding face, his words rang in my ears: "Ah, Andrei, Andrei, help her out!"

Help her out! I hardly knew anything about her. I did not even know where she lived. She had left her old lodgings where Gelfreich had seen her home on the evening when we had first met, and Semyon could not get her to tell him where she had moved to. Neither he nor I knew her surname.

I remember asking her about it at one of our sittings when Gelfreich was not there. He had gone to the academy that morning (I made him attend the sketching class once in a while) and we had spent the whole day together. Nadezhda Nikolayevna was a bit more cheerful than usual, and somewhat more talkative. Encouraged by this, I made

bold to say: "Nadezhda Nikolayevna, I don't know your surname all this time."

She did not seem to hear my question. A faint shadow crossed her face, and shutting her lips for a moment as if something had startled her, she went on speaking. She spoke about Gelfreich, and I could see that she was trying to lead me away from the subject I had touched on. At last she fell silent.

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna," I said, "tell me, why don't you trust me? Have I ever given you cause. . . ."

"Please don't," she said sadly. "I don't trust you? Nonsense. . . . Why shouldn't I? What harm can you do me?"

"Then why do you. . . ."

"Because it is better so. Get on with your painting, hurry up, it will be dark soon," she said, trying to sound cheerful. "Gelfreich will soon be here, too; what will you show him? You have not done anything today. We spend all the time talking."

"There's plenty of time . . . I'm tired. . . . If you like you can come down and rest a bit."

She came down and sat in a chair standing in the corner. I sat down at the other end of the room. I was dying to have a talk with her, to ask her all about herself, but I felt this getting more and more difficult from one sitting to another. I looked at her sitting there hunched up, her hands clasping her knees, and her eyes staring fixedly at the floor. One of Semyon's cats was rubbing against her dress and looking up into her face in a friendly manner while it crooned its good-natured little song. She seemed to have frozen in that attitude. What was going on in that proud unhappy heart?

Proud! Yes, that is no idle word that has fallen from my pen. Even then I thought that her ruin had come about because she would not bend. Perhaps, if she had yielded in something, she would have lived as others live, she would have been an interesting young lady "with enig-

matic eyes," then she would have married and become submerged in a sea of aimless existence at the side of a husband absorbed in extremely important affairs in some high post. She would dress herself up, entertain, bring up her children ("a son at the Gymnasium, a daughter at the institute"), dabble in charities, and, upon reaching the end of her allotted span, give her husband occasion to announce his "deep sorrow" in the *Novoye Vremya* the next day. But she had been knocked out of the saddle. What had made her leave the beaten path of "respectability"? I did not know, and tried in vain to read it in her face. It was inscrutable, and her eyes were still fixed upon the floor.

"I feel rested, Andrei Nikolayevich," she suddenly said, looking up.

I stood up, looked at her and then at the canvas, and said, "I can't do any more today, Nadezhda Nikolayevna."

She glanced at me, wanted to say something, but checked herself and went out of the room to change. I remember flinging myself into the armchair and burying my face in my hands. A deep inexplicable sadness flooded my soul. A vague expectancy of something unknown and awesome, an overmastering impulse to do something—I knew not what—and a tenderness towards that unhappy creature combined with that odd sense of timidity which her presence always inspired me with—all these mingled in a single overpowering feeling I could find no name for. I do not know how long I sat there, sunk almost in complete oblivion.

When I came to myself she was standing before me dressed for going out.

"Good-bye," she said.

I got up and gave her my hand.

"Wait a minute . . . I want to tell you something."

"What is it?" she asked anxiously.

"A lot, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, a whole lot. Can't you sit for once not as a model?"

"Not as a model? But what else can I be to you? May God help me from being anything else to you—from being what I was . . . what I am," she corrected herself quickly. "Good-bye. Shall you soon be finished with the picture, Andrei Nikolayevich?" she asked when she reached the door.

"I don't know. I think I'll have to ask you to come here for another two weeks or three."

She was silent, as if she could not bring herself to say what she wanted.

"Is there anything you need, Nadezhda Nikolayevna?"

"Do any of your . . . er . . . artist friends need a. . . ." she stammered.

"A model," I broke in. "I'll try to arrange that for you, Nadezhda Nikolayevna, I certainly will."

"Thank you. Good-bye."

Before I could give her my hand the bell rang. She paled and sank into a chair. Bessonov came in.

X

He entered with a gay careless air. For a moment I thought he looked thinner than when I had last seen him, but the next moment that impression vanished. He greeted me cheerfully, bowed to Nadezhda Nikolayevna, who continued to sit in her chair, and began speaking animatedly.

"I've dropped in to have a look at your work. It interests me very much. I want to know whether you really can do anything now that you have such a model, better than which you could hardly desire."

He glanced at Nadezhda Nikolayevna. She was still sitting. I expected her to get up and go away, I wanted her to, but she remained as if chained to her chair, her gaze fixed upon Bessonov's face in utter silence.

"That's true," I said. "I could ask for nothing better. I

am very grateful to Nadezhda Nikolayevna for consenting to sit for me."

Saying which I moved the easel away from the wall and placed it in proper position.

"There you are," I said.

He fastened his eyes upon the picture. Obviously he was deeply impressed, and I felt rather flattered.

Nadezhda Nikolayevna suddenly got up.

"Good-bye," she said in a low voice.

Bessonov spun round and took several steps in her direction.

"Oh, don't go away, Nadezhda Nikolayevna! I haven't seen you for so long, and now that I have met you here almost by accident, you want to run away from me. Wait a little, if only five minutes; we'll go together, I'll see you home. I couldn't find you anywhere. They told me at your old lodgings that you had left town; I knew it wasn't true. I made inquiries at the Address Bureau, but they didn't have your address there yet. I intended to inquire again tomorrow in the hope that they would have your address by that time; but now, of course, it is unnecessary; you will tell me yourself where you live; I shall see you home."

He spoke rapidly and with a touch of tenderness that I had never heard from him before. His present tone was so unlike that in which he had spoken to Nadezhda Nikolayevna that evening when Gelfreich and I had run into them both!

"There's no need to, Sergei Vasilyevich, thank you," Nadezhda Nikolayevna answered. "I will go home by myself. I need no one to see me home, and. . . ." she finished quietly, "I have nothing to talk to you about."

He made a gesture, wanted to say something, but only a single odd sound escaped from his throat. I could see that he was trying to control himself. He took a turn about the room, then said to her in a low voice:

"Go then.... If you have no need of me, then all the better for both of us... perhaps for the three of us...."

She went away with a gentle pressure of my hand; we were left alone. Presently Gelfreich came in; I invited Bessonov to stay and have dinner with us. In a fit of abstraction, he did not answer me at once, then suddenly caught himself and said:

"Dinner? I don't mind. I haven't been here for a long time. I'd like to have a good talk today."

And so he did. At the beginning of the meal he hardly said anything beyond throwing out a few curt responses to Semyon, who spoke about his cats without a stop, saying he had definitely made up his mind to drop them. It was about time he really took up something serious. Eventually, under the influence, perhaps, of two glasses of wine, Gelfreich's animation communicated itself to him, and I must say that I had never seen him so lively and eloquent as he was at dinner that evening. Towards the end he quite monopolized the conversation and read us quite a lecture on domestic and foreign politics; two years' experience in writing leading articles on all kinds of questions enabled him to speak quite freely about these things, of which Gelfreich and I, occupied as we were with our sketches, knew very little.

"Look here, Semyon," I said when Bessonov had gone, "I'm sure that Bessonov knows Nadezhda Nikolayevna's surname."

"What makes you think so?" asked Gelfreich.

I described to him the scene that had been enacted here before he came.

"Then why didn't you ask him? I understand you, though; I'll find it out myself."

Why, indeed, had I not asked Bessonov? I cannot answer that question even now. I knew nothing about the relations between him and Nadezhda Nikolayevna at that time, but

I was already haunted by a vague presentiment that something was going to happen between those two people, something strange and mysterious. I had wanted to check Bessonov's fervid speech on opportunism, interrupt his exposition of the dispute at to whether capitalism was or was not developing in Russia, but the words had stuck in my throat every time.

I told Gelfreich about it. I told him in the following words:

"I don't know myself what it is that prevents me from speaking about her simply. There is something between them. I don't know what it is."

Semyon, who was pacing the room in silence, crossed over to the dark window, looked out into the darkness, and answered:

"But I do. He despised her, and now he is beginning to love her. Because he sees. . . . Oh, what a hardened, egotistical heart, what an envious heart, that man has, Andrei!" he exclaimed, turning to me and shaking both hands in the air. "Beware of him, Andrei!"

An envious heart? Envious. . . . What can it envy?

XI

From Bessonov's diary. Yesterday Lopatin and Gelfreich met Nadya and I. Against my wishes they got acquainted. This morning I went to see him to put a stop to it, but I was not able to do anything. They will see each other every day, sit together for hours, and I know what it will lead to.

In vain do I try to solve the question as to why I take such a warm interest in this matter. What difference does it make to me? Admittedly, I have known Lopatin for many years, and I believe I sincerely sympathize with that talented youth. I do not wish him ill, but intimacy with a fallen woman, who has been through fire and water, is an

evil, especially for such an untainted nature as his. I have known this woman for a fairly long time. I got to know her when she was already what she is. There was a time, I must confess, when I yielded to weakness, and, attracted by her rather uncommon looks and what I believed to be remarkable personality, I thought more about her than I should have done. But I soon mastered myself. Knowing by long experience that it were easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a woman who had tasted that poison to return to a normal honest life, and after watching her closely, I became convinced that she had none of the saving virtues that would have made her an exception to the general rule, and it was with an aching heart that I decided to leave her to her fate. Nevertheless I continued to meet her.

I shall never forgive myself the mistake I made that evening when Lopatin came to me complaining about his failure. I gave myself away by telling him that I had the very person he wanted for a model. I cannot make out why Gelfreich had not told him of it before; he knows her as long as I do, if not longer.

My indiscretion and quick temper have ruined everything today. I should have been more careful; but instead I made that softhearted man lose his temper. He seized some spear or other and drove it into the floor with such force that the window-panes rattled. Seeing what a passion he was in I was obliged to withdraw.

I have not seen Lopatin for some days. I met Gelfreich in the street yesterday and discretely turned the talk on his friend.

She goes there every day; the picture is making swift progress. How does she behave? With modesty and dignity. Always silent. Dressed in black, poorly. Takes money for the sittings. What about Lopatin? Lopatin is very pleased

at having found such a model; he cheered up considerably at first, but now he broods a bit.

"I don't know why you are so interested in all this, Bessonov," the hunchback said to me in conclusion. "You never took any interest in that woman. Yet there was a time when you could easily have saved her. It's too late now, of course . . . too late for you, I mean."

Too late for you! Too late for you! What did he mean? That if it was too late for me it was not too late for his friend? What fools!

What! And this Gelfreich too! He considers himself his friend, knows better than I do what his relations to his betrothed cousin are—yet he does not understand the evil they are working! They will never save that woman; Lopatin will break his heart and the heart of the girl who loves him. . . .

I feel that I must, it's my duty to do something. I will go and see Lopatin tomorrow during the day and see for myself how far things have gone. I will go and see her today.

I went to her lodgings today and did not find her; she has moved and left no address. I was told that she had sold all her dresses. I tried to find her, but neither the Address Bureau nor the house janitors could help me to trace her. I am going to see Lopatin tomorrow.

I must abandon my former line of action. I was mistaken in Lopatin; I thought, judging by his mild nature, that one could speak to him in a peremptory tone; I must say that our previous relations to a certain extent justified that view. The thing is to work on that woman without touching him. There was a time when I thought she was interested in me a bit. I believe that with a slight effort I shall be able to separate them. Perhaps I shall awaken the old feeling in her and she will return to me.

To pay court to Nadezhda Nikolayevna! The idea is crazy, yet I find myself dwelling upon it. I feel that I have no right to allow Lopatin to ruin himself and his whole life.

That woman is mocking me! I spoke to her with all the tenderness of which I am capable, even used a tone that was humiliating to me, but she went away, after uttering a few offensive and scornful words.

She has changed amazingly. That pale face of hers has acquired a stamp of dignity quite out of keeping with her social position. She is at once modest and seemingly proud. What can she be proud of? I scrutinized Lopatin's face, hoping to read there the history of his relations with her. Nothing much: he is rather excited, but that is mainly due to his picture. It is going to be a splendid thing. She stands out on the canvas as if she were alive.

I controlled my anger, and, giving no sign that I felt insulted, stayed to dinner with Lopatin and Gelfreich. We dropped into conversation, and they listened attentively to my lectures on sundry subjects which I am at present working on.

But what am I to do? Let things take their own course? I promised Lopatin once not to mix his cousin Sophia up in these affairs. I must keep my promise, of course. But can't I write to my mother? She sees Sophia, if only rarely, and may tell her. I shall not be breaking my promise, and at the same time. . . .

No, a thing like this should not be left to take its own course. I have no right to do that. As for that woman, I'll make her give up her prey by hook or by crook. The thing is to find out where she lives. Then I can have it out with her. And now I must drop all this and take up my work. In this empty and aimless hurly-burly that we call life there is only one genuine absolute joy: the satisfaction of a man, who, immersed in his labours, forgets all the

trivialities of life, and afterwards, when his labour is completed, can say to himself with pride: yes, today I have done good.

XII

Lopatin's notes. Six days have passed since the meeting with Bessonov, but Nadezhda Nikolayevna has not come to see me. She merely sent me a note asking me to excuse her as she was busy.

I showed Gelfreich the note and we both concluded that she was unwell. She had to be found at all cost. If we had known her surname we could have found her address at the Address Bureau; but neither he nor I knew her name. It was no use asking Bessonov. I was in despair, but Semyon promised to find her if he had "to search the bottom of the sea" to do it. Getting up early the next morning, he dressed with a preoccupied determined air, as if he were going out on a dangerous expedition, and disappeared for the rest of the day.

Left by myself, I tried to do some work, but I could not. I took a book down from the shelf and started to read. The words and thoughts passed through my mind without registering. I tried hard to concentrate, but could not get through more than several pages.

I shut the book—a good clever book, which only a few days ago I had read with the eagerness and pleasure which one always derives from good reading—and went out to roam about the town.

A slender half-conscious hope of meeting if not Nadezhda Nikolayevna herself, then someone who could enlighten me, did not leave me all the time, and I peered at the passers-by and often crossed the road on seeing a woman who in any way resembled the familiar image. But I met no one except Captain Grum-Skrzebicki. It was some time past three (it was the end of December and getting already dark) and he was taking a stroll down Nevsky Prospekt

with a grand air of dignity. It was very warm, and the captain's smart fur coat, unbuttoned at the neck, revealed a coloured silk tie with a brilliant tie-pin; the captain's hat shone as if it were polished, and his hand, sheathed in a fashionable yellow glove with thick black seams, rested on a walking-stick with a large bone knob.

Seeing me, he smiled an affable lofty smile, made an affable gesture with his hand, and came up to me.

"I am delighted to see Monsieur Lopatin," he said. "This is a very pleasant meeting."

He shook my hand, and in reply to my question about his health, continued:

"Thank you. Are you taking a stroll, or are you in a hurry to go somewhere? If the former is the case, do you mind taking a walk with me? I would gladly go your way, but it's a habit of mine, Monsieur Lopatin, to take my daily walk along Nevsky twice in each direction. I never break that rule."

I was going to turn back in any case, so I joined the captain. He sustained the conversation with dignity.

"This is my second pleasant meeting today," he said. "I have also met Mr. Bessonov and learned that he too is a friend of yours."

"So you know Bessonov, too, Captain?"

"Ask me whom I do not know!" the captain said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Mr. Bessonov lived in my hotel, too, when he was a student. We were good friends, sir. The people who lived in my hotel—you'd be surprised, Monsieur Lopatin. The captain knows many an engineer, lawyer and writer who are now famous. Yes, quite a lot of celebrated people know me."

In the course of this speech the captain bowed politely to a gentleman with a preoccupied and intelligent face who passed by swiftly. The gentleman looked puzzled, then smiled and nodded to the captain in a friendly way.

"He does not forget old friends, although he has risen

to high rank, that gentleman has, Monsieur Lopatin. Well-known Engineer Petrishchev. Lived at my hotel as a student too."

"And Bessonov?" I asked.

"Bessonov is a fine gentleman, too. Rather weak as regards the lovely eyes of the gentle sex, I should say," the captain added, bending over towards my ear.

I felt my heart begin to beat faster. It seemed to me that the captain ought to know something about Nadezhda Nikolayevna too.

The captain bowed again to some passing acquaintance and resumed:

"Yes, if he were not such a fine young gentleman I would have quarrelled with him, *pan* Lopatin. But I remember my own youth, and besides, an old soldier can still appreciate a pair of lovely eyes. . . ."

He glanced at me sideways and winked; his narrowed eyes grew a bit oily.

"I am very glad you know Bessonov, Captain," I began. "I did not know it."

"Yes, he lived at my hotel for a very short time."

"Was he acquainted with. . . ."

Suddenly I felt horribly ashamed of myself. My tongue was checked in the very act of pronouncing the name of Nadezhda Nikolayevna. I glanced at the captain, who was staring hard at me with a suddenly changed expression. He now looked like a hawk.

"But, pardon me, I don't suppose you would know," I ended up lamely.

He looked at me, assumed an air of complete unconcern and flourished his stick.

"Yes, an old soldier has lots to remember," he went on as though I had asked him nothing. "The shady side of fifty," he added with a sorrowful shake of the head. "I must say I envy you, Monsieur Lopatin, but I envy only your youth."

"Where did you serve, Captain?" I asked, recollecting Gelfreich's words.

The captain's expression underwent a sudden change once more. He became grave, looked right, then left, then over his shoulder, and bent close to my face, his moustache almost touching my ear.

"Between you and me, as between honest gentlemen! The man before you, Monsieur Lopatin, is a soldier of Mekhov and Opatov!"

He stepped back a pace and regarded me with a look that seemed to invite astonishment. I made an effort to give my face the expression suitable to the occasion.

"It is a secret which I confide only to a few very near friends," the captain whispered again, leaning towards me, then recoiling again, and eyeing me with a triumphant air.

It remained for me to express my gratitude for the confidence and to take leave of him, as we were already approaching Politseisky Bridge.

I was annoyed with myself; I had very nearly mentioned the name of Nadezhda Nikolayevna to a man in whom I did not feel the slightest confidence.

When I came home, Agafya informed me that "our cat-lover" had not arrived yet. She served me my dinner and stood by the door with a face that expressed extreme regret on account of my poor appetite.

"Why doesn't that lady of yours come any more, Andrei Nikolayevich?" she said.

"I suppose she is ill, Agafya."

She shook her head, and, drawing a deep sigh, went out into the kitchen to fetch me my tea. It was a long time since I had dined without Gelfreich, and I felt very miserable.

XIII

After dinner the postman brought a letter from Sonya.

I have never concealed anything from her. When I die—and that will happen soon, as death is not creeping up to

me, but approaching with a firm tread, the sound of which I hear clearly in the sleepless nights when I feel worse and when both my illness and visions of the revived past torment me more than ever—when I die, and she reads these notes, let her know that I had never lied to her, never. I wrote her everything that I thought and felt, and if I omitted anything in my long letters, it was something the existence of which in my own heart I had never suspected, or would not admit to myself, although I had vaguely felt it.

But she knew me. Although she was only nineteen, she understood with that sensitive and loving heart of hers what I had not dared admit to myself, what had never taken shape in my mind in definite words.

"You love her, Andrei. I wish you happiness. . . ."

I could not read further. A torrent of emotion swept over me and through me. I leaned back in the armchair with the letter in my hands, and sat there motionless for a long time with closed eyes, while the torrent surged and stormed within my breast.

It was true, I loved her. I had never experienced that feeling before. I had called my fondness for my cousin love; I had been prepared in a few years to become her husband, and I might have been happy with her. If anyone had told me that I could fall in love with another woman I would not have believed him. It had seemed to me that my destiny had been settled. "Here is thy wife," said the Lord to me, "and thou shalt have no other"—of that I was firmly convinced; I was certain of my future, confident of my choice. To love any other woman seemed to me a needless and unworthy whim.

And then had come that strange unhappy creature with a ruined life and anguish in her eyes; at first pity had gripped my heart; anger against the man who had treated her with such disdain had made me take her part all the stronger, and then. . . . Then, I don't know how it hap-

pened.... But Sonya was right: I loved her agonizingly and passionately, with the first love of a man who had not known love until the age of twenty-five. I wanted to tear her out of the hell of misery in which she was plunged, to carry her away in my arms, somewhere far far away, to lull her upon my breast so that she would forget, to see that lifeless face brighten with a happy smile. And Sonya had told me all that in a single line.

"Do not think about me. I do not want to say that you should forget me altogether, but merely that you should not think about causing me any pain. I shall not complain of a broken heart, and shall I tell you why? Because it is not broken at all. I have got used to regarding you both as a brother and a fiancé: the former was real, but the latter, I believe, people invented and forced upon us. I love you better than anyone else in the world; I need hardly have written that, because you know it yourself; but when I read your last letter and told myself the truth about you and Nadezhda Nikolayevna—believe me, my dear, not a drop of bitterness mingled with my feeling. I understood that I am a sister to you, not a wife; I understood it from the joy which I felt at your happiness—joy mixed with fear for you. I do not conceal this fear; but may God help you to save her, and be happy, and make her happy.

"From what you have written me about Nadezhda Nikolayevna, I think that she is worthy of your love...."

A new joyous feeling gradually took possession of me as I read those lines. I did not share Sonya's fears; what did I have to fear? When and how it happened I do not know, but I believed in Nadezhda Nikolayevna. All her past life, of which I knew nothing, and her fall—the only thing in her life that I did know—seemed to me something accidental, unreal, an error of fate, in which Nadezhda Nikolayevna was not to blame. Something had rushed upon her, spun her round, knocked her off her feet, and flung her into the mud, but I would lift her out of it, press her

to my heart and assuage the anguish of that bruised life.

A sharp loud ring at the door made me start. I don't know why I did it, but without waiting for Agafya to come shuffling up to open the door, I rushed out and unbolted it myself. The door flew open, and Semyon, seizing my hands, hopped about on one spot, shouting in a shrill happy voice: "I've brought her, Andrei, I've brought her!"

Behind him stood a dark figure. I rushed up to her, seized her trembling hands and began to kiss them, scarcely hearing what she was saying to me in a voice that was deep with emotion and suppressed tears.

XIV

The three of us sat together for a long time on that memorable evening. We talked, and joked, and laughed; Nadezhda Nikolayevna was calm and seemingly even cheerful. I did not ask Gelfreich where and how he had found her, and he himself did not say a word about it. Between me and her nothing was said to hint at all that I had been thinking over and feeling before her arrival. It was hardly modesty or indecision that restrained me; it was simply that I considered it needless, superfluous; I was afraid to turn the knife in her wounded soul. I was as talkative and cheerful as ever; Gelfreich expressed his delight with boisterous gayety; he beamed, talked without a stop and sometimes made Nadezhda Nikolayevna smile at his antics. Agafya laid the table and brought in the samovar. When everything was arranged to her satisfaction, she stood by the door, cheek in hand, surveying us all for several minutes and watching Nadezhda Nikolayevna brewing the tea and acting the hostess.

"Is there anything you need, Agafya?" I asked.

"I need nothing, my dear, I'm just looking at you. Can't an old woman look without giving offence!" she said. "I'm

just looking at the young lady there doing the honours. It does me good to see it."

Nadezhda Nikolayevna hung her head.

"It does make a nice change, after seeing the men doing everything for themselves—pouring out the tea, and all that. Excusing the liberty, Andrei Nikolayevich, but I'm beginning to find things a bit dull here too without a mistress about the house."

She turned away and shuffled off down the passage. Our gayety vanished. Nadezhda Nikolayevna got up and began pacing the room.

My painting stood in a corner. I had not gone up to it for some days, and the paint on it had dried. Nadezhda Nikolayevna looked at her picture for a long time, then turned to me and said with a smile:

"We shall soon be finished now. I will not make any more breaks like that. It will be ready in good time for the exhibition."

"How you resemble it!" Semyon interposed.

She broke off abruptly, as if a sudden thought prevented her from speaking, and moved away from the picture with a frowning face.

"What's the matter, Nadezhda Nikolayevna? Frowning again!" I said.

"Nothing much, Andrei Nikolayevich. I really do resemble that picture very much. It occurred to me that many people know me, too many.... I can imagine what is going to happen...."

She was breathing hard and tears stood in her eyes.

"I was thinking of all the talk, all the questions you would have to listen to!" she resumed. "'Who is she? Where did you find her?' And the people to ask will be those who know who I am and where I was to be found...."

"Nadezhda Nikolayevna...."

"You did not shun me, Andrei Nikolayevich, you and dear Semyon; I was a human being to you. It is the first

time this has happened to me in three years. I did not believe in myself.... Do you know why I left you? I thought (forgive me for it!), I thought you were like the rest of them. I thought—there, I, my face, my body have come in useful for something, and so I came to you. The picture was nearing completion, you were polite and tactful towards me; I was not used to being treated like that and did not believe in myself. I did not want to experience a certain kind of blow, because such a blow would have hurt me very very much...."

She sat down in the deep armchair and dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Forgive me," she continued. "I did not believe you, and it was with horror that I awaited the moment when you would at last look at me with the eyes I had grown so used to during these last three years, because no one during those three years has looked at me in any other way...."

She stopped; her face was distorted with pain, and her lips quivered. She looked into the far corner of the room as if she saw something there.

"There was one man, only one, who did not look at me like all the rest ... or like you. But I...."

Gelfreich and I listened to her with bated breath.

"But I killed him...." she breathed in a barely audible voice.

A fit of wild despair seized her; a cry of anguish broke from her tortured breast and piteous childlike sobs rent the silence of the room.

XV

From Bessonov's diary. I am waiting for something to happen. I went there recently and saw them together. All the will power that I possess was insufficient to enable me to go on wearing the mask of indifference and politeness

that I have put on; I felt that if I stayed another quarter of an hour I would cast it off and show my real face.

The woman is unrecognizable. I have known her for three years, and have grown accustomed to taking her for what she was during those years. Now I see the change that has taken place in her, and I don't understand her; I don't know whether that change is genuine, or whether it is merely a role skilfully played by a wretched creature who is accustomed to deceive herself and others.

I could not make out anything about their relations. I do not even know whether she has become his mistress or not. Somehow I do not think she has. If so, she is cleverer than I thought. What is she aiming at? To become his wife?

On re-reading these few lines I find that everything written in them is untrue, except the fact that she has changed. I myself, three years ago, noticed something about her that one seldom meets with among women in her position. I myself very nearly adopted the role of saviour, which Lopatin is now playing with such magnanimity. But I was then more experienced than he is now: I knew that nothing would come of it, so I gave it up without even trying to do anything. In addition to the usual obstacles that exist in this respect, her nature presented one particular obstacle—a kind of sheer obstinacy and defiance. I saw that she had given everything up as hopeless, and would resist my very first attempt. And I did not make that attempt.

Did Lopatin? I don't know. I merely see that the woman is unrecognizable. That she has given up her former way of life I know for a fact. She has moved to a poky little room, keeps both Gelfreich and that saviour of hers out of it, goes to his rooms to sit for him, and does sewing besides. She lives very poorly. She is like a drunkard who has taken the pledge not to drink. Will she keep it? Will

that sentimental artist, who does not know life and understands nothing about it, help her to do it?

Yesterday I wrote my mother a detailed letter. She will probably do exactly what I want her to do—women love to meddle in such affairs—and pass it all on to Sophia Mikhailovna. Perhaps that will save him.

Save him! Why do I worry about his salvation? I have never taken such an interest in other people's affairs in all my life. What is it to me whether Lopatin takes up with that woman or not, whether he drags her out of the mud or is pulled down in it himself, and ruins his life and neglects his talent in wasted efforts? I am not given to reflecting and rummaging about in my soul; and now, for the first time in my life I am obliged to probe and analyze my feelings. I cannot make out what is going on within me and why I take on as I do. I thought (and I still think) that it is only a selfless desire to avert disaster for a man towards whom I am well disposed. But on closer examination of my thoughts, I see that it is not quite so. Why, if I am desirous of saving him, do I think more about her; why does *her* face, once so provocative and full of mirth, and now so wistful and gentle, rise to my mind every minute of the day; why is it she, and not he, who fills my soul with such a strange and baffling emotion in which ill will is predominant? Yes, perhaps it is true that I am not so much concerned in doing *him* good as doing her. . . .

What? Ill? No, I do not wish her ill. And yet I would like to tear her away from him, deprive her of his protection, in which, perhaps, all her hopes lie. . . . Oh, can it be that I wish to stand in Lopatin's place!

I must see her today. This whole affair gives me no peace. I can't work, I can't do anything. My work is going slow, and I have not done half as much these last two weeks as I used to do in two days. This question must be settled somehow. I must have it out, make it clear to myself, and then . . . then what?

Give it up? Never! My whole pride rises up at the mere suggestion. I found her. I could have saved, but I didn't want to. Now I do.

XVI

Lopatin's notes. Gelfreich ran for the doctor who lived on the same staircase; I brought some water, and soon the hysterical fit was over. Nadezhda Nikolayevna was sitting in a corner of the sofa, to which Gelfreich and I had carried her, a stifled sob escaping her every now and then. I was afraid to disturb her, and went into the next room.

The doctor was not at home, and Semyon came back to find that she had already calmed down.

She got up to go away, and Semyon offered to see her home. She pressed my hand and looked me straight in the face with tear-filled eyes, an expression of timid gratitude on her face.

A week went by, then a fortnight, a month. Our sittings continued. Truth to tell, I endeavoured to drag them out; I do not know whether she understood that I was doing this on purpose, but she often hurried me. She was calmer, and sometimes—although not very often—cheerful.

She told me her whole story. I debated with myself for a long time whether to put that story down in my diary or not. I decided not to. Who knows what hands this notebook might fall into. Even if I knew for certain that no one but Sonya and Gelfreich would read it, I would never mention Nadezhda Nikolayevna's past there: they both know it well. As before, I concealed nothing from my cousin, and gave her the whole long and bitter story of Nadezhda Nikolayevna in the letters I wrote her at the time. Gelfreich got it from her own mouth. Consequently, there was no need for them to read the story in my diary. As for others . . . I do not want others to judge her! I learned the whole story of her life, and was her judge, and I forgave her everything that, in the opinion of the

world, calls for forgiveness. I was made the recipient of her painful confession and the story of her misfortunes, the most terrible misfortunes that could ever befall a woman, and it was not censure that stirred in my breast, but a feeling of shame, the humiliating feeling of a man who considers himself to blame for the evil he is told about. The final episode of her history filled me with horror and compassion; the words which she had spoken that evening when Gelfreich had brought her and she had had that fit of hysterics, had not been empty words. She had really killed a man without knowing it. He wanted to save her, but he could not. His weak hands were powerless to keep her on the brink, and having failed, he went over it himself. He shot himself. She had told me the dreadful story with a sort of dry-eyed toneless determination, and I could not get it out of my mind for a long time. Could a broken heart be mended, could such frightful wounds be healed?

But the wounds seemed to have healed. She grew steadily calmer, and the smile returned to her face more often. She came to me every day and stayed with us for dinner. After dinner we all three sat on for a long time, and what we only talked about, Gelfreich and I, during those quiet hours! Nadezhda Nikolayevna put a word in once in a while.

I particularly remember one of those talks. Gelfreich, while still continuing with his cats, had begun assiduously to paint sketches. He admitted once that he was working so hard because he was planning a picture, which he would paint "perhaps in five, perhaps in ten years' time."

"Why so long, Semyon?" I asked, barely able to suppress a smile at the solemn air of gravity with which he made known his intentions.

"Because it is a serious thing. It's a life work, Andrei. You think that only tall people with straight backs and straight chests can plan serious things? Oh, you conceited

longlegs! Believe me," he proceeded with affected solemnity, "great feelings may lie hidden between these humps, and great thoughts may be hatched in this long box" (he tapped the side of his head).

"Is that great thought a secret?" asked Nadezhda Nikolayevna.

He looked at the two of us for a moment in silence, then said:

"No, it is not. I will tell you. The idea occurred to me a long time ago. Listen. Prince Vladimir the Bright Sun was once wroth with Ilya of Murom for his bold speeches, and commanded him to be seized, and locked up in a deep dungeon and immured in it. The old Cossack was led away to his death. But, as it always happens, the Princess Yevpraksinia 'in those days was quickwitted': she found a secret passage to Ilya and sent him a wafer every day with water and wax tapers to read the Bible by. And a Bible, too, she sent him."

Semyon paused reflectively, and was silent for so long that I was moved at last to ask, "Well, Semyon?"

"That's all," he said. "Of course, the Prince, before long, had need of the old Cossack: the Tatars had come and there was no one to deliver Kiev in her hour of sore need. Vladimir then deeply repented of what he had done. But Yevpraksinia forthwith bade men go into the dungeons deep and lead Ilya forth by his lily-white hands. Ilya bore no malice, he mounted his good steed, and so on and so forth. He put all the Tatars to the sword. That's all."

"But where does the picture come in?"

Semyon looked at me with an expression of exaggerated astonishment and threw up his hands.

"An artist! An artist, he calls himself! And of all men Lopatin, Andrei Lopatin! Why, there are thirty, three hundred, three thousand pictures here, if you want to know, but I will choose only one and paint it; I'll paint it or die in the attempt! Can't you see him sitting in the dun-

geon? Does it not present itself to you as if it were real? Just imagine: a cave, a cellar, any dark hole like the caves of Kiev. Narrow passages, a small niche in the wall. Dust, cobwebs, mould—something weird and sinister, made still more weird by the light of a wax taper. And Ilya sits upon the step, in front of him a lectern, and on the lectern a great holy book with thick leaves of parchment yellow and warped with age, and with the characters on them in red and black. The old Cossack sits there in his shirt, reading attentively and turning over the stiff leaves of the book with big rough hands, the hands of a peasant used to the bridle, the spear and the sword, or simply the club. They are toil-worn, too, those hands, and a lifetime of hard work has made them shaky, so that they turn over the leaves of the holy book with difficulty.

"Ah, my dear chap," Gelfreich suddenly broke off, "the trouble is there were no spectacles in those days. If there had been, Yevpraksinia would surely have sent him a pair—big, round, silver-rimmed spectacles. Life in the steppe must have made him far-sighted, don't you think so?"

We both burst out laughing. Gelfreich looked at us perplexedly, then, as it dawned on him what we were laughing at, he smiled himself. But he dropped back into the solemn vein of his narrative, and proceeded:

"I leave you to imagine what eyes he had; they are the most difficult to describe. The eyes mean everything to me. Eyes and lips. Well then, he sits there, reading. The Sermon on the Mount. And he reads there that whosoever shall be smitten upon the right cheek shall turn the other also. And he reads that passage and understands it not. Ilya had toiled hard all his life; a multitude of Pechenegs, Tatars and robbers had he slain; many a foul fiend, fire-breathing serpent, warlock, and wicked giant had he vanquished; deeds of valour had he performed all his life, guarding the precincts of Christian Rus against the heathen; he had believed in Christ, and prayed to him, and

thought he was fulfilling his behests. He had not known what stood written in the book. And now he sits and thinks: 'Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' How is that, Lord God? I can understand if someone smites me, but what if a woman is wronged, or a child ill-treated, or the heathens come to rob and slay Thy servants, O Lord? Not touch them? Leave them to plunder and kill? Nay, Lord, I cannot obey Thee! I shall mount my good steed, take my spear in my hand, and go forth to do battle in Thy name, for I understand not Thy wisdom; Thou hast given my soul a voice, and I listen to that and not to Thee!' And his hand quivers, and the yellow leaf of the book with the red and black characters in it quivers too. The candle burns with a feeble flame; a thin black wisp of smoke curls upwards and disappears in the darkness. And only Ilya and the book are illumined by that light, just the two. . . ."

Semyon became silent and thoughtful, leaning back in the armchair and gazing up at the ceiling.

"Yes," I said after a long silence, "that is a good picture, Semyon. Only it sounds better than it will look in paint and canvas. How are you going to express it?"

"I will do it for certain, I will!" Semyon exclaimed earnestly. "I will do it! I will put that question mark—Ilya and the Bible. What is there in common between them? For that book there is no greater sin than killing, and Ilya had been killing all his life long. The horse he rides on is all hung about with instruments of execution—not death, but execution, for he executes. And when that arsenal runs low or is not at hand, he fills his helmet with sand and lays about him with that. And yet he is a saint. I saw him in Kiev. . . . He lies with all the rest of them. And rightly so. . . ."

"That is quite right, Semyon, but it's not what I meant. Paint will not be able to express it."

"Nonsense! Even if it doesn't express it fully, there is no

harm. The question will have been put. . . . Wait a minute!" Semyon cried excitedly, seeing that I was about to interrupt him. "You will say the question has already been put? So it has. But it is not enough. It has to be put every day, every hour, every minute. It must give people no peace. And if I think I can paint a picture that will convey even a tenth of what I want it to convey, then I must do it. I have been wanting to do it for a long time, only these have been putting me off."

He bent down, picked up the tawny cat, which had been sitting on the rug as if listening attentively to his speech, and placed it on his knees.

"You're doing the same thing, aren't you?" Semyon went on. "Doesn't your picture express the same question? How do you know whether that woman acted rightly? You make people think, that's all. And apart from the aesthetic feeling that every picture arouses in us, and which, in itself, is not really worth much, is it not that which gives meaning to what we are doing?"

"Gelfreich, my dear Semyon," Nadezhda Nikolayevna said suddenly, "I have never seen you like this. I always knew you had a noble heart, but. . . ."

"But you thought I was a silly little hunchback? Do you remember calling me that once?"

He looked at her, and must have noticed a shadow cross her face, for he added:

"Forgive me for bringing this up. Those years should be wiped out of our memory. Everything will go well. It will, Andrei, won't it?"

I nodded. I was very happy then: I saw that Nadezhda Nikolayevna was gradually quieting down, and—who knows?—perhaps the last three years of her life would come to be a mere far-away memory instead of an actual experience, a bad hazy dream from which one awakens to find the night quiet and peaceful, the room unchanged, and one is glad that it was only a dream.

XVII

Winter was passing. The sun kept rising higher, warming St. Petersburg's streets and roofs. The drain pipes everywhere were noisy with thawing water and falling icicles. Wheeled cabs appeared, rumbling over the thawed patches of cobble-stone roadway with a revived sound that was new to the ear.

I had finished my picture. After several more sittings I could take it to the academy and submit it to the exhibition experts for their judgement. Gelfreich congratulated me on my success in advance. Nadezhda Nikolayevna looked at the picture with pleasure, and I often caught an expression of quiet contentment on her face that I had not seen there before. At times she was even gay and jocular, mostly at Semyon's expense. The latter was completely engrossed in reading a multitude of books, which, he said, were necessary for the picture he was going to paint, and examining albums with all kinds of antiquities and studying the Bible. His cats had run away, all except the permanent tawny favourite, who now lived in retirement, and was hardly ever bothered by his master to discharge the duties of a model. Since our last talk about Ilya of Murom, Semyon had painted only one picture, which he had sold for a hundred and fifty rubles; this money, he said, would last him a long time, all the more that, to my great surprise, he was not in the least embarrassed by his long sojourn at my place, where life cost him nothing.

We all three spent most of our leisure hours together. Gelfreich secured somewhere for Nadezhda Nikolayevna a huge manuscript, containing the project of some important personage—a project under which Russia was to derive a tremendous benefit within the very near future—and she copied it out in a fine large hand. Since this great benefit to Russia required rather intensive brainwork, the project was amended and supplemented without end, and

has not, I believe, reached completion to this day. I wonder who is copying it out now, after Nadezhda Nikolayevna?

In any case she was not needy. The money that she earned by copying and sitting for me sufficed for a living. She lodged in the same little room where she had moved to when going into hiding. It was a low narrow room with a single window overlooking a blank wall; a bed, a chest of drawers, two chairs and a card-table, which served both for writing and meals, comprised the appointments of the place. Whenever I went there with Semyon, he would go into the kitchen and ask the landlady for a stool. These visits, however, were rare; the room was very uninviting and cheerless, yet Nadezhda Nikolayevna would not hear of leaving it. For the most part we gathered at my apartment, where the rooms were bright and spacious.

Not once had I spoken to her about what was taking place in my heart. I was contented and happy in the present; I understood that an incautious touch might reopen wounds that were perhaps still raw. I might lose her for ever were I now to insist upon the fulfilment of my most cherished thought, desire, and hope. I would not have been able perhaps to keep so calm and self-restrained for so long had that hope not been so strong. I firmly believed that in another six months, or a year, or even two years (time did not frighten me), when she would have become her old self again, restored in mind and body, she would see beside her a firm support upon which she could lean, and would become mine for a lifetime. It was more than hope really, I knew for certain that she would be my wife.

I do not know whether Bessonov understood this. His occasional visits were disturbing to our tranquillity and introduced an element of embarrassment into our conversation. Outwardly he was calm and looked at Nadezhda Nikolayevna with equanimity. She never spoke to him unless it was to answer his questions, and listened to his dis-

courses on a variety of subjects. He was extremely well-read and spoke well. Oddly enough, this smooth loquacity of his struck me as being a mask to hide from us something that was preying on his mind. Afterwards I learned that this was so, that his apparent calmness concealed a festering sore that was killing him, like that saintly French divine who was said to be invulnerable and wore a red cloak during battle in order to conceal the blood that flowed from his wounds. But I learned that when it was already too late.

For some reason he had moved back to the captain's "hotel." I went there once. This room, like his old one, was littered with books, periodicals and papers, but I thought they were lying about in great disorder and were covered with dust, as if no one had done any work in this room for a long time. At home he behaved differently, not as he did at our place in the presence of Nadezhda Nikolayevna; he spoke very little and paced up and down the room gloomily, smoking a cigarette. I felt that I was unwelcome and decided not to go there any more. I asked him, by the way, whether he knew anything about the captain and whether it was true that he had been a "soldier of Mekhov and Opatov."

"He has made it up," Bessonov said. "He isn't even a real Pole. He adopted the Greek Orthodox religion a long time ago, and I think he is just trying to impress the young people when he reveals his supposed secret to them."

Two incidents after that visit to Bessonov opened my eyes to his behaviour.

First of all, Sonya sent me a letter describing a conversation that had taken place between herself and Bessonov's mother. The old lady sometimes paid her a visit at the institute for old times' sake: she never forgot the interest Sonya's mother had always taken in her and her son. According to my cousin, she called this time looking excited

and mysterious, and after several awkward and rambling introductions, revealed the purpose of her visit. Her son Sergei had written her in detail about everything that had happened to us. The picture he had painted was as black as he could make it. He *did not ask* his mother to convey the contents of the letter to Sonya, but the old lady, out of gratitude, decided herself to go and tell her everything in order to warn her that she should do something about it while I could still be saved. She was astonished to hear that my cousin already knew all about it. She was upset. She felt ashamed, an old woman like her, telling a girl such things, but what could she do? Poor Andrei had to be saved at all cost. If she were in Sonya's place she would leave the institute and go at once to St. Petersburg to open my eyes.

"Bessonov," wrote Sonya, "is playing a peculiar role in all this affair. I do not believe that he has written all that to his mother without knowing that she would be sure to pass it on to me, and, I should say more, without wishing her to do so.

"I will come up to St. Petersburg, but not until after the examinations. If you agree, we can spend the summer somewhere in the country, and I will study up a bit to make it easier for me at the courses."

This letter upset me, but another letter immediately following it, a long anonymous letter, filled the cup.

The unknown author, in highflown florid language, warned me against the fate that awaited all young men who abandoned themselves to their passions and were blind to the shortcomings of the creature with whom they intended to unite in wedlock, "the ties of which, at first light and unnoticeable, eventually become a heavy chain like that which wretched convicts drag about with them." Such were the terms in which the unknown author expressed himself. "Take the honest word of an experienced old man, Mr. Lopatin, that inequality in marriage is a very

terrible thing. It is a thing that has robbed the world of many a great talent; please remember that, Mr. Lopatin." Then followed a regular indictment against Nadezhda Nikolayevna, whose soul was called "the prey of hell" (here I definitely recognized the hand of the captain). She was accused of a long life of lust and vice, which she could have abandoned had she wished, "because she has relatives of her family, though very distant ones, who—I am sure—would raise the fallen woman from her present social position, but owing to a natural depravity, that woman has chosen to wallow in the mud from which you are vainly attempting to save her, in which attempt, without a doubt, you will ruin your own life and your wonderful talent." She was accused of having killed a man, "and a very respectable gentleman he was too, not endowed with such gifts as you, but none the less an excellent man who received a salary of fifty rubles a month and had expectations of increasing it, sufficiently for the two of them to make a comfortable living on, for what more could such a creature as that wretch reckon on, but she chose to reject that young gentleman, Mr. Nikitin, in order to continue in her wicked ways. . . ."

It was a very long letter, and I threw it into the burning stove without finishing it. That Bessonov had had a hand in this I was almost certain. Why should the captain worry about saving my soul? The blood rushed to my head, and my first impulse was to run and see Bessonov. I don't know what I would have done to him. The captain was furthest from my thoughts; that renegade, who concealed his desertion, had been persuaded, made drunk perhaps, or intimidated in some way. I snatched up my hat and was already at the door when I collected myself. I had better calm down a bit before deciding what to do.

Strengthened in this resolve, and while waiting for Nadezhda Nikolayevna to come, I tried to paint some of the accessories of my picture in the belief that work would

help to compose me, but the brush danced about over the canvas and my eyes could not distinguish the colours. I dressed with the intention of going out and getting some fresh air; opening the door, I saw Nadezhda Nikolayevna standing before it pale and breathless, with a look of terror in her dilated eyes.

XVIII

From Bessonov's diary. What agony of mind! The yearning! It gives me no peace, no matter where I am, no matter what I do to forget it, to deaden it somehow. My eyes have been opened at last; it is a month since I have written anything in this diary, and that month has decided everything. What has happened to that belauded philosophic calm of mine? Where are my sleepless nights spent at work? I, who prided myself on having character in these characterless times, have been crushed and destroyed by the burst of a storm. What storm? Is that a storm? I despise myself, despise myself for my former pride, which did not prevent me from bending to an idle passion; despise myself for having allowed this demon in the image of a woman to take possession of my soul. Yes, if I believed in the supernatural, I could not account for what has happened otherwise than as a diabolical possession.

I have re-read these lines. . . . What humiliating, pitiful complaints! Oh, where is my pride, where my strength of will that enabled me to keep my grip on life and live it the way I wanted? I demeaned myself to petty intrigue by writing a letter to my mother, who no doubt passed it all on to his cousin, as I had intended, but nothing came of it; in my impatience I made an old illiterate fool write a letter to Lopatin—and nothing will come of that, either, I know it. He will throw the letter in the fire, or, still worse, show it to her, his mistress, and they will read it together and laugh at the illiterate effusions of the captain's soul

and make fun of me, for they will understand that no one but I could have instigated the captain to such a vulgar action.

His mistress! But is she? The word dropped from my pen, but I don't know to this day whether it is true or not. And if it is not? What if there is still hope for me? What makes me think that he is in love with her except vague suspicions, excited by mad jealousy?

Three years ago it was all possible and easy. I lied in this very diary when I wrote that I had given her up because I had seen no way of saving her. At any rate, I was deceiving myself. She could easily have been saved. All I had to do was to bend down and pick her up. I did not want to bend down. I did not realize this till now, when my heart aches for love of her. Love! No, this is not love, this is a mad passion, a consuming fire. How to extinguish it?

I will go and have a talk with her. I will summon all my forces and speak calmly. Let her choose between me and him. I will tell her nothing but the truth, I will tell her that she cannot rely on that impressionable man, who thinks of her today, but tomorrow will be absorbed in something else and forget about her. I am going! This must be put an end to one way or another. I can't stand the torture any longer.

The same day.

I have seen her. I am now going to see him.

These are the last lines that will be written in this diary. Nothing can restrain me. I have lost control of myself. . . .

XIX

Lopatin's notes. What is the sense in dragging out these notes? Had I not better leave my reminiscences at this?

No, I will finish them. All the same, if I throw up my pen and this notebook, I will relive that terrible day for the thousandth time; for the thousandth time I will ex-

perience the horror, the pangs of remorse, the agony of loss; for the thousandth time the scene which I am now about to describe will pass before my eyes in all its details, and every one of those details will shatter my heart with the force of terrible new blows. I shall continue till the end.

I conducted Nadezhda Nikolayevna into the room; she could scarcely stand on her legs and was trembling as with fever. She looked at me with the same terrified glance and for the first minute could not utter a word. I made her sit down and gave her some water.

"Andrei Nikolayevich, beware. Lock the door . . . do not let anyone in. He is coming."

"Who, Bessonov?"

"Lock the door," she whispered.

Anger welled up in me. Anonymous letters were not enough, he threatened violence.

"What has he done to you? Where did you see him? Calm yourself. Have some more water and tell me about it. Where did you see him?"

"He came to my room. . . ."

"For the first time?"

"No. He came twice before. I did not want to tell you so as not to make you angry. I asked him to stop coming; I told him that I couldn't bear to see him. He went away without saying a word, and kept away for three weeks. Today he came early and waited till I had dressed."

She paused. It was difficult for her to continue.

"Well?"

"I never saw him like that before. He spoke calmly at first. It was about you. He said nothing bad about you, he only said that you were an impressionable man who was apt to be carried away, and that I could not rely upon you. He simply said that you would drop me, because you would soon get tired of it all. . . ."

She broke off and began to cry. Oh, never had such love

and compassion taken possession of me! I took her cold hands and kissed them. I was deliriously happy; the words tumbled from my lips unrestrainedly. I said that I loved her and would love her as long as I lived, that she must be my wife, that she saw and knew that Bessonov was wrong. I told her a thousand absurd words, happy words, for the most part meaningless, but she understood them. I saw her sweet face, radiant with joy, upon my breast; it was quite a new, somewhat unfamiliar face, not the face with that secret anguish in its features which I had been accustomed to seeing.

She smiled, and cried, and kissed my hands, and snuggled up to me. At that moment there was not a soul in all the world except us two. She said something about how happy she was, how she had come to love me from the very first days of our acquaintance, and how she had run away because that love had frightened her; she said that she was not worthy of me, that it terrified her to think of my fate being linked with hers; and again she embraced me, again she cried with tears of joy. Presently she caught herself.

"What about Bessonov?" she suddenly said.

"Let him come," I answered. "Who cares about Bessonov."

"Wait, let me finish what I began to say about him. Yes, he spoke about you. Then about himself. He said that he was a much more reliable support than you were. He reminded me that three years ago I had loved him and would have married him. And when I said that he was deceiving himself, all his pride rose up, and he lost his temper to such an extent that he rushed at me. . . . Wait a minute," Nadezhda Nikolayevna said, seizing my hand when she saw me leap to my feet. "He did not touch me. I am sorry for him, Andrei Nikolayevich . . . he fell at my feet, that proud man did! You should have seen it!"

"What did you tell him?"

"What was there to tell? I was silent. All I said was that I did not love him. And when he asked whether it was because I love you, I told him the truth. Something dreadful came over him then—I don't know what it was. He threw himself upon me, embraced me, whispered 'farewell, farewell!' and made for the door. I never saw such a terrible face before. I sank into a chair, weak and trembling. He turned round at the door with a queer laugh and said: 'I shall be seeing you two again, though.' And his face looked awful. . . ."

She broke off abruptly, deathly pale, and stared at the door of the studio. I looked round. Bessonov was standing in the doorway.

"Didn't expect me?" he said, stuttering. "I came by the backstairs so as not to trouble you."

I leapt to my feet and confronted him. We stood like that for a long time, measuring each other with our eyes. He really was a terrifying sight. Pale, with bloodshot eyes fixed upon me in hatred, he said nothing; his thin quivering lips whispered something. I suddenly felt sorry for him.

"What have you come here for, Sergei Vasilyevich? If you want to talk to me, go and calm yourself first."

"I am calm, Lopatin. . . . I am ill, but calm. I have settled everything, and there is nothing for me to be excited about."

"What have you come for?"

"To tell you a few words. You think you will be happy with her?"—he pointed to Nadezhda Nikolayevna. "You will not! I will not let you."

"Go away," I said, making a violent effort to speak calmly. "Go and lie down. You said yourself you were ill."

"That is my business. You listen to what I am telling you. I was mistaken. It is my fault. I love her. Give her to me."

He has gone mad!—the thought struck me.

"I cannot live without her," he continued in a hoarse strangled voice. "I will not let you out until you have said 'yes'!"

"Sergei Vasilyevich!"

"And you will either tell me 'yes' or. . . ."

I took him by the shoulders and turned him towards the door. He went obediently, but on reaching it, turned the key in the lock, pushed me away roughly, and took up a threatening attitude. Nadezhda Nikolayevna screamed.

I saw him transfer the key to his left hand, while he lowered his right into his pocket. When he drew it out again a gleaming object lay in it which I scarcely found a name for at the time. The sight of it horrified me. Beside myself, I seized the spike standing in the corner, and when he levelled the revolver at Nadezhda Nikolayevna, I flung myself upon him with a wild cry. The world crashed into darkness . . . . . .

. . . . . .

Then began the torture.

I do not know how long I lay unconscious. When I came to myself I remembered nothing. The fact that I was lying on the floor, looking up at the ceiling through a queer bluish haze with a feeling in the chest that prevented me from stirring or uttering a word, did not surprise me. It all seemed to be right, needful for something or other—for what, I simply could not remember.

The picture! Yes, Charlotte Corday and Ilya of Murom. He sits reading, while she turns the leaves over for him, laughing wildly. . . . What nonsense! That is not it; that is not the thing Gelfreich spoke about.

I make a movement and feel a sharp pain. That is as it should be, of course.

Utter silence. A revived fly drones in the air and beats against the window-pane. The inner winter frames have

not been taken out yet, but the gay rattle of the droshkies can be heard through them. The mist, the queer bluish haze, clears from my eyes and I distinctly see the crude moulding around the hook in the middle of the ceiling. It seems to me a very odd ornament; I had never noticed it before. And something touches my hand; I turn my head and see a hand, a small, soft white hand lying on the floor. I cannot reach it, and feel very sorry that I can't, because it is the hand of Nadezhda Nikolayevna whom I love more than anything in the world. . . .

And suddenly a bright ray of consciousness bursts upon me, and I recollect everything that happened. He had killed her.

It cannot be! It cannot be! She is alive. She is only wounded. Help! Help! I shout, but not a sound comes. Only a stifled choking sound in my breast and a pink foam on my lips. He has killed me too.

With an effort I sat up and saw her face. Her eyes were closed and she lay still. I felt the hair stirring on my head. I wished I could lose consciousness. I flung myself upon her breast and covered her face with kisses. A face that but half an hour ago had been pressed to my bosom, a face full of life and happiness. Now it was still and set; the tiny wound over the eye was no longer bleeding. She was dead.

When the door was broken down and Semyon rushed up to me I felt my strength to be at its last ebb. I was lifted up and laid upon the sofa. I saw them take her and carry her out, and I wanted to cry out, ask them, beg them not to do it, and to leave her here next to me. But I could not cry out; all I could do was to whisper soundlessly while the doctor examined the wound in my chest through which the bullet had passed.

He, too, was carried out. He lay with a stern ghastly face covered with blood that poured from a deadly wound in his head.

I am finishing. What more can I add?

Called out by Semyon's telegram, Sonya arrived immediately. I have been nursed long and carefully, and am still being nursed. Sonya and Gelfreich are positive that I will live. They want to take me abroad and think that the journey will work wonders.

But I feel that I have not many more days to live. My wound has closed, but my chest is ravaged by another disease: I know that I have consumption. And a third, still more deadly disease, is aiding it. Never for a moment do I forget Nadezhda Nikolayevna and Bessonov; the ghastly details of that last day stand perpetually before my mind's eye, and a voice whispers ceaselessly into my ear that I have murdered a man.

I was not tried. The "case" was dismissed on the grounds that I had killed in self-defence.

The human conscience, however, knows no written laws, no theory of irresponsibility, and I am suffering the punishment of my crime. I have not much longer to bear it. Soon the Lord will pardon me, and we three shall meet there, where our passions and sufferings will seem insignificant and all will be submerged in the light of eternal love.

1885

THE SIGNAL

Semyon Ivanov was a track-walker. His cabin was twelve versts away from the railway station in one direction, and ten in the other. A large spinning mill had been opened the year before about four versts away, and its tall chimney rose darkly from behind the forest. The only dwellings around were the cabins of the neighbouring track-walkers.

Semyon Ivanov was a sick, broken-down man. He had been in the war nine years before, serving all through the campaign as an officer's servant. He had known hunger, and cold, and blazing heat, and had made twenty-five and thirty-five mile marches in heat and cold, rain and shine. He had been under fire, too, but no bullet, thank God, had got him. His regiment had once been in the firing line, and there had been skirmishing with the Turks for a whole week. Our men had lain on this side of a glen, the Turks on the other, and there had been a steady cross-fire from morning till evening. Semyon's officer was there too; three times a day Semyon brought him his meals and a boiling samovar from the regimental kitchen in the ravine. He carried the samovar through a clearing, and the bullets whizzed around him and smacked against the rocks. Semyon was terrified, and sometimes he cried, but he kept straight on. The officers were pleased with him, because they always had hot tea. He came home from the war unharmed, but his legs and arms began to ache. He fell on evil days. Coming home, he found that his old father had died; his four-year-old son had died, too, from some throat trouble. Semyon was left all alone in the world with his wife. They could not work the farm; ploughing the land with rheumatic arms and legs was no easy task. Life in their home village became unbearable, and so they set out to seek their fortune in other places. They tried their luck on the border, in Kherson, and in the Don, but without success. Then the wife went into domestic service, while Semyon continued to wander about. Once he happened to ride on an engine, and at one of the stations the face of the station-master seemed familiar to him. Semyon looked at the station-master, and the station-master looked at Semyon, and they recognized each other. He had been an officer in their regiment.

"You are Ivanov?" he said.

"Yessir."

"What are you doing here?"

Semyon told him all about it.

"Where are you going now?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Idiot! What do you mean, you don't know?"

"I mean I have nowhere to go, sir. I am looking for a job, sir."

The station-master looked at him, thought a bit, then said: "Look here, old chap, you stay here at the station for a time. You're married, aren't you? Where is your wife?"

"Yessir, I'm married. My wife's in the town of Kursk in service with a merchant there."

"Well then, write her to come here. I'll get you a free ticket. There will soon be a vacancy as track-walker here. I'll speak to the division chief about you."

"Thank you very much, sir," said Semyon.

And so he stayed at the station. He helped in the station-master's kitchen, chopped firewood, and swept the yard and the platform. In a fortnight's time his wife arrived and they went out together to their railway cabin on a hand-trolley. The cabin was newly built and warm, with as much firewood as you wanted; there was a small vegetable patch left over from the previous tenants, and about half a dessiatine of arable land on either side of the track. Semyon was delighted; he began to think of how he would do some farming, buy himself a cow and a horse.

He was given the necessary outfit—a green flag, a red flag, lanterns, a horn, a hammer, a wrench for tightening the nuts, a crow-bar, a spade, a broom, bolts, and rail spikes; they also gave him two books of regulations and a time-table. At the beginning Semyon did not sleep for nights at a stretch, learning the time-table by heart; two hours before a train was due he would go over his section, then sit down on the bench outside his cabin, looking out

all the time and listening whether the rails were humming or a train could be heard rumbling. He learned the regulations, too, by heart, although he could barely spell out the words.

It was summer; the work was not hard; no snow to clear away, and trains on that line were infrequent. Semyon would go over his verst of track twice a day, tightening up nuts here and there, levelling down the bed, and examining the water pipes, and then go home to attend to his household. The trouble there was that he always had to get the inspector's permission for the least little thing he wanted to do. The inspector had to report to the division chief, and all this took a long time. Semyon and his wife were getting tired of it.

Two months went by; Semyon began to make the acquaintance of his track-walker neighbours. One was a very old man, whom the authorities were always meaning to relieve; he could barely move out of his cabin and his wife did all the work for him. The other track-walker, the one nearer the station, was a young man, rather skinny but wiry. He and Semyon met for the first time on the line midway between their cabins when going over their sections; Semyon raised his hat and bowed.

"How d'ye do, neighbour", he said.

The neighbour glanced askance at him.

"How d'ye do," he said, and turned away.

Later their wives met each other. Semyon's wife Arina greeted the neighbour, but the latter did not say much either and went away. Semyon met her once.

"Your husband isn't very chatty, young woman, is he?"

The woman did not say anything at first, then replied: "What's he got to talk about? Every man has his own worries. God be with you."

However, after a month or so, they became acquainted. Semyon and Vasily would meet on the line, sit down on

the edge of the embankment, smoke their pipes and talk about life. Vasily did not have much to say for himself, but Semyon talked about his home village and the campaign he had been through.

"Yes, I've had a pretty tough time," he said, "and God knows I'm not that old. I've had no luck. You've got to put up with the lot that God gives you. Yes, brother Vasily, that's how it is."

Vasily knocked the ash out of his pipe, stood up, and said:

"It's not bad luck or God's lot that's getting us down, but the people around us. There isn't a beast on earth as cruel and vicious as human beings are. Wolf doesn't eat wolf, but a man will just swallow another man whole."

"Don't tell me that, brother. A wolf does eat wolf."

"That was just my way of talking. All the same, man's a nasty beast. If it wasn't for his being so wicked and greedy life wouldn't be so bad. Everyone tries to take a snap at you, bite a piece of you off, swallow you up."

Semyon pondered.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe you're right, and if you are, then it's God's will."

"If that's the way you think," said Vasily, "then I have nothing to talk to you about. If you're going to blame God for all that's bad, and just sit and bear it, then you're not a man, but an animal. That's my opinion."

And he turned and went away without saying good-bye. Semyon also got up. "Neighbour!" he shouted. "There's no need to get angry."

But Vasily did not look round. Semyon gazed after him until he was lost to sight at a dip in the bend. He came home and said to his wife:

"Well, Arina, that neighbour of ours is a nasty piece o' work, I tell you."

However, they did not quarrel; they met again and discussed the same things.

"Ah, brother, if it wasn't for men, you and I would not be poking around in these cabins," said Vasily.

"What's wrong with the cabins, they're not so bad."

"Not so bad, not so bad.... Ugh, you! You have lived long and learned little, looked at much and seen little. What sort of life is it for a poor man in a cabin here or anywhere else? These blood-suckers are eating you up alive, squeezing you dry, and when you get old they'll chuck you out just as they would husks to feed the pigs with. How much do you get in wages?"

"Not much, Vasily—twelve rubles."

"And I get thirteen fifty. I ask you—why? According to the company's regulations we are all entitled to fifteen rubles a month, heating and lighting free. Now who decides that you should have twelve and I thirteen and a half? Whose pocket does the other three or one and a half rubles go into? Can you tell me that? And you say—it's not bad! It isn't even a question of one and a half or three rubles. Even if they paid the full fifteen. Last month I was at the station when the director rode through; I saw him—I had that honour. Travelled in a special coach all to himself; came out on the platform, stood there showing the gold chain on his belly, cheeks red and fat. Bloated with our blood that he has sucked up. Ah, if I had the power! No, I shall not stay here long; I'll go away somewhere, anywhere."

"But where will you go, Vasily? You won't find anything better. At least here you have a house, warmth, a piece of land. Your wife is a help."

"Land! You ought to see that piece of land. Not a stick growing on it. I planted some cabbages in the spring, and the inspector comes along and says, 'Hullo, what's this? Why didn't you report it? Why didn't you ask permission? Dig them up, the whole bally lot.' He was drunk. At any other time he would not have said anything, but this time he says, 'Three rubles fine!' just to have it his own way."

Vasily paused, sucking at his pipe, then said quietly:

"I could have knocked the fellow's brains out."

"You're a hot-tempered one, neighbour, let me tell you."

"Temper has nothing to do with it. I speak the truth and I think for myself. He's asking for trouble and he'll get it, that fat mug! I'll complain to the division chief, I will. You'll see."

And so he did.

The division chief once came to inspect the line. Some important personages from St. Petersburg were expected in three days' time; they were making a tour of inspection, and so everything had to be put in order before their arrival. The bed was ballasted and levelled, the sleepers were carefully examined, the spikes driven in a bit harder, the nuts tightened up, the posts painted, and yellow sand was sprinkled at the level crossings. The woman at the neighbouring cabin turned her old man out to weed. Semyon worked all the week. He put everything in order, mended and cleaned his tunic, and polished up his brass plate with brick dust until it fairly shone. Vasily worked too. The division chief arrived in a trolley, four men working the handles so that the gears whirred and the wheels hummed as the trolley hurtled down the line. It came flying up to Semyon's cabin; Semyon ran up and reported in soldierly fashion. Everything was found to be in order.

"Have you been here long?" the chief inquired.

"Since the second of May, sir."

"All right. Thank you. And who is at number one sixty-four?"

The traffic inspector (he was travelling with the chief on the trolley) answered: "Vasily Spiridov."

"Spiridov, Spiridov. . . . Ah, is that the man you reported last year?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well then, let's see this Vasily Spiridov. Move on!"

The men fell to work on the handles and the trolley got under way.

Semyon watched it, thinking: "Well, there's going to be trouble."

A couple of hours later he started on his round. He saw someone coming down the track from the wood cutting. A closer look showed him that it was Vasily. He had a stick in his hand and a small bundle over his shoulder, and his cheek was bound up in a handkerchief.

"Where are you off to, neighbour?" shouted Semyon.

Vasily came up quite close. He looked awful, his face white as chalk, his eyes blazing; his voice, when he spoke, was choky.

"I'm going to town," he muttered. "To Moscow . . . to the Head Office."

"The Head Office? Ah, you are going to complain, I suppose? Drop it, Vasily, forget it."

"No, mate, I won't forget. It's too late to forget. Look, he hit me in the face, drew blood. I won't forget it as long as I live, and I won't drop it. They've got to be taught a lesson, those blood-suckers."

"Drop it, Vasily," Semyon said, taking his arm. "Believe me, you won't better things."

"Better things! I know myself I won't better things; you were right about fate. It won't do me any good, but a man must stand up for right."

"Yes, but how did it happen?"

"How? He looked everything over, got off the trolley, looked into the cabin. I knew beforehand that he'd be strict, so I had everything shipshape. He was about to go away when I made my complaint. He started shouting right away: 'Here's a government inspection coming down and you make a complaint about a vegetable garden, damn you! Privy councillors are coming, and he talks about his cabbage!' I answered something back, I couldn't help myself; it wasn't so bad, really, but he took it amiss. He

gave it to me hot. Our accursed patience! I should have given it to him, too, but instead I just stood there as if it was the right thing. When they went away, I came to myself, washed my face, and started off."

"And what about the cabin?"

"My wife is there. She will look after things. To hell with their railway!"

Vasily got up to go.

"Good-bye, Semyon. I don't know whether I'll find anyone to listen to me."

"Surely you are not going to walk?"

"I'll try to get a lift on a goods train at the station, and tomorrow I'll be in Moscow."

The neighbours took leave of each other. Vasily was away for some time. His wife did his work for him, and went without sleep night and day; she was eaten up with anxiety. On the third day the commission arrived: an engine, a luggage-van, and two first-class carriages, but there was still no sign of Vasily. On the fourth day Semyon met his wife. Her face was swollen from crying and her eyes were red.

"Has he come back?" Semyon asked.

But the woman made a hopeless gesture and went her way without saying a word.

Semyon had learned, when still a lad, to make pipes out of osier rods. He would burn the core out of a rod, drill holes in it, make a mouth-piece at one end, and tune the thing so well that you could play almost any air on it. He made quite a number of these pipes in his spare time and sent them to the market in town by goods train conductors of his acquaintance; they fetched two kopeks a piece there. The day after the commission's visit he left his wife at home to meet the six o'clock evening train, and went into the woods with a knife to cut some osier rods. He went to

the end of his section–at this point the line made a sharp bend–descended the embankment and struck downhill into the woods. About half a mile away there was a big marsh with excellent willows for his pipes growing on the edge of it. He cut a bundle of osiers and started home through the woods. The sun stood low; the only sounds in the deathly stillness were the twittering of the birds and the crackle of the deadwood underfoot. As he walked on, nearing the embankment, Semyon fancied he heard a sound like that of iron striking iron. He quickened his pace. No repairs were being made on his section. What could it mean? He came out on the fringe of the woods–the railway embankment rose up before him; on the top a man was squatting, doing something to the track; Semyon crept up quietly: he thought the man was after the nuts. But when the man stood up, he saw a crow-bar in his hands; he had placed it under the rail and was tearing it up. Everything went dark before Semyon's eyes; he wanted to cry out but he could not. Then he saw that it was Vasily. He ran, and Vasily, with a crow-bar and a wrench in his hands, tumbled head over heels down the other side of the embankment.

"Vasily! Man alive, come back! Give me the crow-bar. We'll put the rail back, no one will know. Come back! Don't take this sin on your soul!"

Vasily did not look back; he plunged into the woods.

Semyon stood looking at the torn-up rail; he had thrown down his bundle of osiers. It was a passenger train that was due, not a goods train. And he had nothing to stop it with, no flag. He could not replace the rail; you could not drive the spikes in with your bare hands. He must run, run back to his cabin for some tools. "God help me!" he gasped.

Breathless, he started running towards his cabin. He ran, stumbling, almost dropping. He cleared the forest; the cabin was only a few hundred feet away at the most, but just then the mill whistle sounded. It was six o'clock. In two minutes' time the train was due to pass. Good God!

Save those innocent souls! Semyon could almost see it: the engine strikes the edge of the rail with its left wheel; it shudders, careens, rips up the sleepers, smashes them to pieces, and right there is a curve, a bend, an eighty-foot embankment, down which it goes toppling, its third-class coaches chock-full of people, little children. . . . All sitting in the train now, little dreaming of the danger. God, tell me what to do! No, there is no time to run to the cabin and back again. . . .

Just short of the cabin, Semyon turned back and ran faster than ever. He ran blindly, not knowing himself what he was going to do. He came to the torn-up rail; his sticks lay there in a heap. Bending down, he picked one of them up, not knowing why, and ran on. He thought he could hear the train coming already. He heard the distant whistle, felt the quiet steady tremor of the rails. His strength gave out, he could run no more. He stopped within about two hundred and fifty yards of the awful spot. A light burst upon his mind. Taking off his cap, he took out of it a cotton handkerchief, pulled his knife out of his boot top, and crossed himself, muttering, "God help me!"

He slashed his left arm with the knife above the elbow; the blood spurted out in a hot stream; he soaked his handkerchief in it, then smoothed it out, tied it to the stick and hung out his red flag.

He stood there, waving his flag. The train was already in sight. The engine-driver would not see him, he would come up too close to be able to stop the heavy train at two hundred and fifty yards!

The blood kept flowing; he pressed the gashed arm to his side to stem the flow, but it was no use. He must have cut his arm very deep. He felt dizzy, and black specks danced before his eyes; then all grew dark, and there was a loud ringing in his ears. He neither saw the train nor heard its noise. There was but one thought in his mind:

"I shall fall, I shall drop the flag; the train will pass over me. Help me, God!"

And the world went black in his eyes, his mind became a blank, and he dropped the flag; but the blood-stained banner did not fall to the ground. A hand seized it and held it aloft before the oncoming train. The driver saw it, shut off the governor and reversed steam. The train came to a standstill.

People jumped out of the carriages and gathered round in a crowd. They saw a man, covered with blood, lying unconscious on the track, and another man standing next to him with a blood-stained rag on a stick.

Vasily ran his eye over the crowd, then hung his head, saying, "Bind me, I tore the rail up."

1887

THE TRAVELLING FROG

Once upon a time there was a frog in the bog. He sat in his mud home catching gnats and midges, and every spring he and his frog friends set up a loud croaking all together. And there he would have lived for the rest of his life–provided the stork had not eaten him, of course–but for a certain adventure that befell him.

One day he was sitting on the bough of a snag that stuck out of the water, enjoying a warm drizzle.

"Ah, what lovely wet weather we are having!" thought he. "Now this is life!"

The rain pattered on his speckled shiny little back; the drops trickled under his belly and behind his legs, and it felt so nice, so delightful, that he all but let out a croak, but fortunately remembered that it was autumn already, and that frogs do not croak in the autumn—they had the spring to do that in—and that no self-respecting frog would be caught croaking in the autumn. And so he kept silent and basked in the rain.

All of a sudden a shrill, intermittent whirring noise came from overhead. There is a breed of ducks whose wings, when they fly, cleave the air with a sound as if they were singing, or rather whistling. Whew-whew-whew-whew—goes the air when a flock of such ducks flies high above you, so high that you cannot even see them. On this occasion the ducks described an immense semicircle and alighted on the very bog in which our frog lived.

"Kra, kra!" one of them said. "We have a long way to fly yet, and must have something to eat."

The frog hid himself at once. Although he knew that the ducks would not eat such a big fat frog as he was, he dived under the snag just in case. On second thoughts, he decided to poke his head out of the water—so curious was he to know where the ducks were flying to.

"Kra, kra!" said another duck. "It's getting cold! We must hurry south, and be quick about it!"

And all the other ducks began quacking their approval.

"I beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen," the frog said, plucking up courage, "but can you tell me—what is this south you are flying to?"

All the ducks crowded round the frog. At first they wanted to eat him, but then every duck thought to itself that the frog was too big and would not go down its throat

Then they all began gabbling together and flapping their wings.

"Oh, it's good down south! It's warm there now! There are such warm lovely swamps there! And the worms! It's wonderful down south!"

They gabbled so loud that they almost deafened the frog. It was all he could do to silence them. Then he asked one of them, who looked fatter and cleverer than the rest, to explain what this south was. On being told, he was simply delighted, but as he was a cautious frog, he could not help inquiring, "But are there many gnats and midges there?"

"Oh, clouds of them!" the duck answered.

"Kwa!" said the frog, and turned round hastily to see whether any of his frog friends had overheard him. They would be scandalized at him croaking out of season, but he could not help giving just one little croak.

"Take me with you!" he said.

"Well, I *am* surprised!" cried the duck. "Fancy saying that, and you having no wings."

"When do you fly?" asked the frog.

"Soon, soon!" cried all the ducks. "Kra, kra! Kra, kra! It's cold here. South! South!"

"Will you please give me five minutes to think it over," said the frog. "I shall soon be back, and I daresay I shall think of something."

Saying which he flopped back into the water, dived into the ooze and buried himself in it completely in order to keep his mind off other things that were likely to distract him. Five minutes went by, and the ducks were already preparing to fly away, when all of a sudden the frog popped his head out of the water near the branch on which he had been sitting. His face was as radiant as a frog's face could ever be.

"I've got an idea!" he said. "Two of you will take a twig in your beaks, and I will hang on to it in the middle.

You will fly and take me for a ride. As long as you do not quack and I do not croak everything will be fine."

Keeping silent and carrying even such a light burden as the frog for three thousand miles was no great pleasure, but the ducks were so delighted at the frog's cleverness that they all readily consented to carry him. They arranged to take it in turns every two hours, and since the ducks, like those in the riddle, were so many, and twice as much, and as much again, and half as much, and a quarter as much, while the frog was only one, it wasn't often that they had to carry him. They found a good strong twig, two ducks took it in their beaks, and the frog hung on to it by his mouth in the middle, and the whole flock took to the air. The dizzy height to which they rose took the frog's breath away; besides, the ducks flew unevenly and jerked the twig; the poor frog jiggled about in the air like a paper clown, and clenched his jaws with all his might to keep from letting go his hold and crashing to the ground. However, he soon got used to his position and even began to take a look round. Fields, meadows, rivers, and hills flashed past below him, but he could not see them very well, because dangling as he was from the twig he could only look backward and a little upward, but the little that he did see filled him with joy and pride.

"What an excellent idea of mine this was," he said to himself.

And the ducks flew behind the leading pair that was carrying him, crying and praising him for all they were worth.

"What a wonderful brain our frog has," they were saying. "You won't find many such brains even among us ducks."

He was on the point of thanking them, but reminded himself that if he opened his mouth he would go hurtling to the ground, and so he clenched his jaws harder and decided to bear it. He dangled like that all day long, the

ducks who carried him changing in mid-air, one letting go the twig while another adroitly caught it. It was a terrifying experience, and more than once the frog nearly croaked from fright. One had to have great presence of mind, and the frog had that. In the evening the whole company came to rest on a bog; at daybreak they continued on their way again with the frog, but this time their passenger, the better to be able to see what went on during the journey, hung on to the twig back and head forward and belly backward. The ducks flew over reaped fields, over yellowing woods, and over villages filled with stacked corn; from there came a murmur of human voices and the knocking of the flails with which they were threshing the rye. The people stared at the flock of ducks, and seeing something odd about it, pointed at it with their fingers. The frog was just dying to fly closer to the ground to show himself and hear what people said about him. At the next halt he said:

"Must we fly so high? I feel dizzy so high up, and I'm afraid of falling should I suddenly feel sick."

And the kind-hearted ducks promised to fly lower. The next day they flew so low that they could hear voices.

"Look, look!" children cried in one village. "The ducks are carrying a frog!"

The frog heard this, and his heart fluttered.

"Look, look!" adults cried in another village. "What a marvel!"

Do they know it was my idea, not the ducks'?–thought the frog.

"Look, look!" the people cried in still another village. "Would you believe it! Who could have thought up such a clever idea?"

At this the frog could no longer contain himself, and throwing caution to the winds, he cried out at the top of his voice, "I! I did!" And with that cry he went hurtling down head over heels. The ducks shrieked, and one of

them tried to catch the poor passenger in mid-air, but missed him. The frog dropped swiftly, kicking all four legs in the air. As the ducks had been flying at a great speed, he dropped not on the spot over which they had been shrieking and where there was a hard road, but much farther out, which was lucky for him, because he fell plop into a muddy pond on the edge of the village.

Presently he popped out of the water, shouting at the top of voice again, "It was me! It was my idea!"

But there was not a soul around. Frightened by the sudden splash, the local frogs had all hidden themselves in the water. When they came out again they were surprised to see the new arrival.

He told them a wonderful story of how he had been thinking hard all his life until at last he had invented a new and unusual mode of duck travel; of how he had had his own ducks who had taken him for rides wherever he wanted; of how he had visited the beautiful south, where everything was so lovely, where they had such wonderful warm swamps, and so many midges and all kinds of other edible creatures.

"I have just dropped in to see how you live," he said. "I shall stay with you till the spring, when my ducks will come back for me. I have let them go for a bit."

But the ducks never came back. They thought the frog had been killed in his fall and were very sorry for him.

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TO THE READER

The Foreign Languages Publishing House would be glad to have your opinion of this book and its design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

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